

## **HISTORIC AND DESIGN REVIEW COMMISSION**

**April 20, 2016**

**Agenda Item No: 4**

**HDRC CASE NO:** 2016-149  
**CITY COUNCIL DIST.:** 1  
**APPLICANT:** Office of Historic Preservation  
**TYPE OF WORK:** Review of National Historic Landmark Designation  
**REQUEST:**

The applicant is requesting review and concurrence of the nomination Casa Jose Antonio Navarro as a National Historic Landmark.

### **FINDINGS:**

- a. As a participant in the CLG Program, the City of San Antonio's chief elected official, the mayor, and the local historic preservation review commission, board or committee must comment on properties nominated within their jurisdictions.
- b. Casa Navarro meets the criteria for National Historic Landmark Designation as an important and exemplary Texas Colonial residence.

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

Staff recommends concurrence and supports the nomination of Casa Navarro as a National Historic Landmark.

### **CASE MANAGER:**

Cory Edwards

# NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

## CASA JOSÉ ANTONIO NAVARRO

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

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### 1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Casa José Antonio Navarro

Other Name/Site Number: Casa Navarro State Historic Site

### 2. LOCATION

Street & Number: 228 South Laredo Street

Not for publication:

City/Town: San Antonio

Vicinity:

State: Texas County: Bexar Code: 029

Zip Code: 78207

### 3. CLASSIFICATION

#### Ownership of Property

Private: ☐

Public-Local: ☐

Public-State: ☒

Public-Federal: ☐

#### Category of Property

Building(s): ☒

District: ☐

Site: ☐

Structure: ☐

Object: ☐

Number of Resources within Property:

#### Contributing

3

0

2

0

5

#### Noncontributing

1 buildings

0 sites

1 structures

0 objects

2 Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 3

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing:

**PROPERTY NAME**

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**4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this \_\_\_\_ nomination \_\_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property \_\_\_\_ meets \_\_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Certifying Official\_\_\_\_\_  
Date\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_\_ meets \_\_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Commenting or Other Official\_\_\_\_\_  
Date\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal Agency and Bureau**5. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION**

I hereby certify that this property is:

- \_\_\_\_ Entered in the National Register  
\_\_\_\_ Determined eligible for the National Register  
\_\_\_\_ Determined not eligible for the National Register  
\_\_\_\_ Removed from the National Register  
\_\_\_\_ Other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Keeper\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Action

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**6. FUNCTION OR USE**

Historic: DOMESTIC Sub: Single dwelling; secondary structure (kitchen)  
COMMERCE / TRADE Sub: Department store (general store); professional (law office)

Current: RECREATION and CULTURE Sub: Museum

**7. DESCRIPTION**

ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION: Mid-19<sup>th</sup>-century / Texas Colonial  
Mid-19<sup>th</sup>-century / Colonial Revival / Georgian Revival

**MATERIALS:**

Foundation: STONE  
Walls: ADOBE, STONE (caliche, limestone)  
Roof: WOOD (shingle)  
Other: WOOD (columns, windows, doors, shutters, gates)  
METAL (gutters)  
STONE (walls or fence)

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**Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.****Location and Setting**

Casa Navarro is located on the northeast corner of the intersection of South Laredo Street and West Nueva Street in the city of San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas, one mile to the south and west of the Alamo. At the time of its construction in the middle of the nineteenth century, the Navarro homestead was situated in the heart of a vibrant Tejano community nicknamed Laredito, or "Little Laredo," to the west of San Pedro Creek and the city's main plaza.<sup>1</sup> It has been suggested that the name of the Barrio ("neighborhood") Laredo stemmed from the road that led south from this quarter of San Antonio de Béxar toward the city of Laredo along the Rio Grande. Between 1847 and 1881, San Antonio was linked to Laredo, and farther west to Chihuahua, by both cart and stage roads.<sup>2</sup> Today, Casa Navarro is situated approximately one-third of a mile east of Interstate 35, which connects to the state capital at Austin to the north, Laredo to the south, and to Interstate 10, which heads east from San Antonio to Houston.

Surrounded today by tall, concrete and steel-framed buildings and asphalt-paved parking lots, Casa Navarro is the last remnant of San Antonio's Barrio Laredo. In the late 1950s, most of the adjacent buildings of Laredito had been cleared in the name of urban renewal, making way for a complex of new city and county government buildings; these include the 14-story Bexar County Detention Center, the Bexar County Family Justice Center, and the Bexar County Fire Marshal's Office. After several successive owners, the San Antonio Conservation Society bought the José Antonio Navarro House (Navarro House) and related buildings and structures in 1960, and a six-foot wide strip of land on the south side of the property was taken to widen Nueva Street in 1962. Directly opposite Casa Navarro, across Laredo Street, is a large surface parking lot, the southeast corner of which features a life-sized bronze statue of José Antonio Navarro, positioned as if gazing upon his final home from his perch upon a stone pedestal.

The state-owned historic site is an irregularly shaped, five-sided parcel of approximately one acre, which is all that remains of the property that José Antonio Navarro purchased for 100 pesos on April 16, 1832. The period of significance for the property begins in 1855, as Navarro gradually took up full-time residency here while he sold his ranch properties, and ends with his death in the house in 1871. The property is defined on its north, northeast, east, and south sides by a rubble limestone wall that was constructed sometime in the 1950s.

Casa Navarro consists of three contributing buildings (the Navarro House, the Mercantile Building, and the kitchen), two contributing structures (a cistern and a well), one noncontributing building (a public restroom and maintenance workshop completed in 2011), and one noncontributing structure (the rubble limestone wall enclosing the site).<sup>3</sup> The northernmost building is the one-story Navarro House, constructed of adobe and limestone, with an overhanging porch shaded by a shed roof covered in wood shingles and supported by wood columns. To the south of the house, at the southwestern corner of the property, is the rectangular, two-story Mercantile Building, made of limestone blocks, with heavy limestone quoins articulating its corners, and capped with a hipped roof covered in wood shingles. The major façades of the Navarro House and the later Mercantile Building face Laredo Street, the western boundary of the site. Approximately 40 feet to the east of the Mercantile Building is the three-room *cocina*, or kitchen, a one-story building constructed of adobe and caliche, with overhanging porch roofs covered with wood shingles and supported by wood columns at its front and rear; the main elevation faces the two other buildings and Laredo Street beyond them. The location of the three contributing buildings on the property creates a courtyard, in which a historic well and cistern are located.

<sup>1</sup> Daniel D. Arreola, *Tejano South Texas: A Mexican American Cultural Province* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 132.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>3</sup> Since the multi-building site is referred to as Casa Navarro, the house is referenced singularly as the Navarro House.

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The historic courtyard space, though available for private leisure, most likely was only utilitarian in function. Between the historic kitchen and the rubble wall on the eastern border of the property is the public restroom and workshop for site management staff.

**Casa Navarro—The Navarro House****Exterior**

The Navarro House has been described by Texas architects and historians as a “typical early Texas colonial...with a long sweeping gable roof that in front forms a porch....a beautiful example of [the] Colonial Renaissance...which stands as a classic, graceful example of the most important era in the history of Texas.”<sup>4</sup> A single-story building with an unfinished attic, Casa Navarro is constructed of adobe and limestone. The house is L-shaped in plan and is 40 feet wide facing Laredo Street. Its perpendicular wing extends approximately 48 feet along the northern boundary of the property. There is also a small, single-room addition at the back of the house on its south side. The date of construction of the original two rooms of the house is estimated to be about 1840, with its later additions about 1850.<sup>5</sup>

The structure of the house includes continuous foundations of native limestone with stone piers supporting the porch columns. The walls are constructed of a combination of blocks of adobe and native limestone, 14 to 16 inches thick, covered with stucco and whitewashed. The side-gabled roof framing is timber and extends beyond the front wall of the house, creating a shed porch that spans the street-facing, west façade. Four solid, chamfered square posts and lintels of wood support the porch roof, which is covered with wood shingles as it was in Navarro’s lifetime. A plain wood railing with wood pickets spans the front porch, and all wood trim has been painted beige, except the fascia on the porch roof, which is stained. The main roof over the house is approximately a 7-12 pitch, sloping to a 6-12 pitch over the porch.

On its front elevation, facing west along Laredo Street, the Navarro House is divided symmetrically into five bays, three of which contain a pair of narrow, single-panel wood doors; the second and fourth bays contain pairs of wood casement windows with 10 lights—two columns of five—in each hinged sash. Its rear elevation, facing east into the walled site, features three symmetrically spaced bays containing two pairs of narrow, single-panel wood doors with one pair of wood casement windows placed between them, all of which open into a utility courtyard with a well and a cistern. Also on that rear elevation, two gabled dormers project from the roof of the main volume, each one featuring a 6-over-6 light, double-hung wood window. The small, one-room addition on the east side features a pair of narrow, single-panel wood doors. The north-facing elevation features three pairs of wood casement windows, irregularly placed, each with 10 lights per sash. Two interior chimneys of native limestone extend beyond the roof peaks on the north side of the house; the third interior chimney rises above the roof on the west elevation between the second and third bays. On the south elevation of the L, facing the courtyard, are three pairs of narrow, single-paneled wood doors and two pairs of wood casement windows, while the south elevation closest to the Mercantile Building features two pairs of wood casement windows, but no doors. All exterior walls of the Navarro House are covered with stucco and whitewashed, except for the north wall, which is maintained with its rubble limestone exposed.

<sup>4</sup> Brooks Martin, AIA, “What Is the Navarro Homestead?” *La Prensa* (December 6, 1959), 6; files of the San Antonio Conservation Society (SACS).

<sup>5</sup> Marvin Eickenroht, AIA, “Jose Antonio Navarro House and Store, San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas,” Historic American Buildings Survey, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, September 1963, 1-3. From Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress (HABS No. TX-3148). Eickenroht stated that the dates were not confirmed through archival research but estimated based upon construction methods.

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Interior

The Navarro House originally was built as the two-room volume that faces west to Laredo Street, with a front and a rear porch, in about 1840; around 1850, two additional rooms were added on the east side, possibly for use as small bedrooms or for storage.<sup>6</sup> A wing was then added to the north side of the house, which is thought to have served as Navarro's bedroom.<sup>7</sup> Quite cleverly, what had been windows on exterior walls—one in each room of the original two-room house—were converted into cupboards on interior walls when Navarro expanded his house.

On the interior, the one-story Navarro House is divided into five rooms, each of different sizes. Ceilings range from 12 to 13 feet high and are of wood with exposed beaded joists. The limestone and adobe walls are finished with lime plaster, and trim around the interior doors is single-beaded wood one-by-fours. Interior doors are single-panel, double doors of wood; each is 1½ feet wide. A 1-inch by 5-inch wood picture rail runs along the walls approximately 6 feet above the floors, which are constructed of 1-inch by 6-inch pine boards.<sup>8</sup> The five rooms include one small room and one larger room across the front of the house, which likely were used for receiving guests; each of these rooms features a fireplace on their north walls. The smaller front room opens to the east into the smallest room of the house, which features one pair of casement windows on the north wall and a door on its south wall that leads to the courtyard. From the courtyard, one may enter the second-largest room in the house, which is at the northern end of the L and likely was Navarro's bedroom; the house's third fireplace is located on the north wall of this room, with a carved wood mantel like the other two.

Integrity of the Navarro House

The Navarro House, as modified and rehabilitated, continues to strongly contribute to the high integrity of the site as a whole, especially with respect to the overall site's historic integrity of feeling and association. Since a rehabilitation project by the Texas Historical Commission in 2011, all wood windows and doors on the west elevation are covered by two-panel wood shutters (not historic), also painted beige, with iron hardware. The wood windows and doors themselves have been restored where possible or replaced to match the historic ones, meeting the Secretary of the Interior's Standards. The wood windows on the south- and east-facing courtyard elevations do not have shutters and have been painted beige; the exception is the pair of wood casement windows facing the courtyard on the small, southern addition, which are covered with single-panel wood shutters (not historic). The attic dormers facing the courtyard have been stained to match the shingled roof. The boxed columns of the rear porches (not historic) and the metal gutters are painted a light, mossy green, and new, wood plank floors of the porch have been installed with ramps for accessibility. The rubble limestone wall between the house and the store—defining the visitors' entrance to the historic site—has had new wood pickets added, along with a new wood gate.

The 2011 rehabilitation included new interpretive exhibits that detail important events in Navarro's life for museum visitors. The interior plaster walls are freshly whitewashed, and the wood floors are stained dark. Flat, wood baseboard and picture rail trim, as well as window and door trim, all are painted beige, as are the wood fireplace mantels. Wood ceilings are painted beige, and track lighting has been installed parallel to the joists. Period furniture such as trunks, a sofa, and chairs—none of which is original to the house—is displayed in its rooms; many of the new, wood exhibit cases are designed to look like tables, cabinets, or lecterns, and do not detract from the feel of the historic house.

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<sup>6</sup> Eickenroht, 2.

<sup>7</sup> Brooks Martin, AIA, "Notes on the Navarro House" (November 16, 1967), 1-2. Typed manuscript in the collections of the San Antonio Conservation Society.

<sup>8</sup> Eickenroht, 4-5.

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**Mercantile Building**Exterior

Prominently located at the corner of Laredo and Nueva streets, the two-story Mercantile Building is a rectangular building of native limestone blocks finished with whitewashed stucco and topped by a hipped roof covered in wood shingles, as it had been in Navarro's time. The Mercantile Building was constructed by October 1856, when Navarro was transitioning to living full-time at the San Antonio property.<sup>9</sup> The Mercantile Building is 24 feet wide on its major elevation, facing west on Laredo Street, and 21 feet long facing south toward Nueva Street. Its most distinguishing architectural details are the large, rough limestone quoins at the corners, which, with the transoms above windows and doors, make it appear as a Colonial Revival or Georgian Revival-styled building. The Mercantile Building also has been described as a "unique example of dignified Spanish Colonial architecture."<sup>10</sup> This stylistic treatment, more decorative and elaborate than the private Navarro House, was appropriate for the building's public purpose as commercial and office space.

Facing west, the symmetrical main façade has two bays with two pairs of narrow, paneled double doors on the first floor, each pair topped with a fixed 2-light transom. New, wood screen doors, stained a rich, dark color, were installed in 2011. The door openings into the first-floor level are approximately 24 inches from the ground. On the second floor, aligned with each door opening, is a pair of wood casement windows with three lights in each operable sash. The north elevation, facing the adjacent Navarro House, is blank, without fenestration of any kind; of note, no limestone quoins decorate the northeast corner of the Mercantile Building, as the public would not have had access to view this corner.

The south elevation—the secondary public elevation, facing Nueva Street—features heavy quoins of rough limestone at its corners, but is without fenestration at the second-floor level. On the left side of its first-floor level is a pair of narrow, paneled wood double-doors topped by a 2-light transom, as found on the west façade, with screen doors added in 2011; on the right side is a pair of 4-light wood casement windows, painted beige. The asymmetrical east elevation, facing the kitchen and courtyard, features a stained wood door on the right side of the first-floor level; the door has two panels in its lower third, and a 2-over-2-light window in its top two-thirds. This door now serves as the main entrance to the Mercantile Building. A new, limestone and concrete ramp for wheelchair accessibility and four concrete steps have been added to that elevation, along with steel pipe handrails, painted beige.

Interior

The two-story Mercantile Building was constructed simply as one room stacked on another, with an interior chimney on the north side to accommodate a fireplace on each floor. Navarro may have rented the ground floor commercial space to a tenant, or he and his sons may have used that room for their own mercantile endeavors. Navarro's son José Angel Navarro III, who in 1850 had graduated with a law degree from Harvard University, may have practiced law from the office on the second floor.

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<sup>9</sup> David McDonald, *José Antonio Navarro: In Search of the American Dream in Nineteenth Century Texas* (Denton: Texas State Historical Association, 2010), 250; also see n13, 327. George W. Kendall, Navarro's companion during the ill-fated Santa Fe Expedition, visited Casa Navarro in October 1856 and subsequently described the buildings on Navarro's property in personal correspondence. Eickenroht, in his HABS narrative of 1963, wrote that the Mercantile Building was constructed ca. 1850; see Eickenroht, 2.

<sup>10</sup> Eickenroht, 1.



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Today, the Mercantile Building functions as the state historic site's visitor center and gift shop. Wood floors are stained a dark color, and the plaster walls are whitewashed. Baseboard trim, the fireplace's wood mantelpiece, and the wood ceiling all are painted a grayish blue; track lighting is installed parallel to the exposed joists. The second floor, which is not accessible to the public, contains storage and office space for the site manager and staff. The walls here, too, are whitewashed, and the wood ceiling, mantelpiece, and baseboards all are painted the same grayish blue; the floor is stained a dark color. The limestone hearths of the fireplaces on both floors are in excellent condition.

### Integrity of the Mercantile Building

The Mercantile Building has been modified over the years to accommodate different uses by subsequent tenants; however, these changes, which occurred outside the period of significance, do not detract from the visitors' experience or importance of the building, especially within the overall context of the site, which retains high integrity..

As documented in Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) drawings, the interior of the Mercantile Building was rather simple. The historic floor—likely wood as in the adjacent Navarro House—had been replaced in 1936 by a concrete slab, and the fireplace, slightly more than 5 feet wide, had been walled up on the first floor. A 3½-inch square post supported a girder that spanned the ceiling from north to south, supporting the second floor. All interior walls on both floors were covered in plaster, and there was no baseboard trim. All door and window openings were cased on both floors, and the second-floor fireplace featured a beautifully carved wood mantelpiece, slightly more than 4½ feet high, on the north wall. On the second floor, the ceiling was canvas tacked directly to the joists and 2-inch wood strips or battens; the wood floorboards were of random widths ranging from 4 to 6½ inches.<sup>11</sup>

San Antonio-based architect Brooks Martin wrote in his 1967 "Notes" that sometime after 1936 a fire destroyed the floor joists and the canvas ceiling.<sup>12</sup> He also stated that the majority of the limestone walls were "hollow" and in poor condition at that time, with the quoins and the exterior stucco or plaster finish serving to hold the building together. In his role as the architect of the historic site's restoration by the San Antonio Conservation Society (SACS), Martin repaired the limestone bearing walls as needed, and applied a new coat of stucco.<sup>13</sup> Although the HABS drawings did not show an interior stair and the HABS report specifically stated that "the second floor is accessible only by an outside stairway on the East side,"<sup>14</sup> Martin described a "very small" opening between the first and second floors, which would have required "a very steep ladder-like stair" along the east wall.<sup>15</sup> On the exterior, the HABS drawings documented a staircase of unornamented lumber, with balusters simply square in section, constructed diagonally across the east elevation (descending north). A straight run of 15 steps from the landing at a wood door at the southeast corner of the second floor, the staircase ended at a double-door with a small square opening at the top of each, which the HABS team had documented as "not historic." This documentation also showed that at some point in the early twentieth century, sheets of galvanized iron replaced the wood shingles on the hipped roof of the Mercantile Building.

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<sup>11</sup> The canvas ceiling is described in Bartlett Cocke, "Navarro House," Written Historical and Description Data, February 25, 1937, and Zeb Rike, Measured drawing, Historic American Buildings Survey, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1936. From Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress (HABS No. TX-317).

<sup>12</sup> Martin, "Notes," 4.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 5. Instead of using the words "restored" or "repaired," Martin wrote: "The original type of construction was replaced and stucco was placed on these walls."

<sup>14</sup> Cocke, "Navarro House," 1.

<sup>15</sup> Martin, "Notes," 5.

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Photographs taken in the 1930s show a frame lean-to structure and what appears to be an outhouse on the south and east sides of the Mercantile Building, respectively.<sup>16</sup> These two utility buildings, thought to have been constructed well after Navarro's death in 1871, were removed from the site in the 1960s by the San Antonio Conservation Society. Because the lean-to and the outhouse did not date to the period of significance, their absence does not affect the site's integrity.

These same photographs from the 1930s also show the Mercantile Building's stucco walls to have been colorfully painted with advertising, as the building served as a grocery and café or bar during these years. These uses continued through the decades as Barrio Laredito saw significant decline. In 1952, a San Antonio newspaper reported: "The house, no longer in the Navarro family, is now a tavern and the [mercantile] building next to it is a grocery store, just as it was for a time when the Navarros owned it."<sup>17</sup> As discussions of urban renewal programs accelerated in the late 1950s, the neighborhood was selected to be the location of a new county jail, and local journalists covered the battle between city and county government and the San Antonio Conservation Society, which was hoping to save Casa Navarro from the wrecking ball. A 1959 newspaper article reported: "[I]n the last few years the buildings have been used for taverns, both of which became such evil spots they were closed by the police vice squad."<sup>18</sup> A photograph from this period shows both the Navarro House and the Mercantile Building functioning as bars.

Following the Texas Historical Commission's 2011 rehabilitation project, which meets the Secretary of the Interior's Standards, the main elevation of the Mercantile Building, facing west to Laredo Street, now features new, 3-light wood casement window sashes installed within existing wood window frames on the second floor; they have been painted the same beige color as the wood features on the Navarro House exterior. On the first floor, new wood doors and wood screen doors, stained a rich, dark color, have been installed. The same wood door and screen door has been installed on the Nueva Street elevation, and the adjacent 4-light wood casement window is painted beige. A new, wood door has been installed on the east elevation, with four lights in its upper two-thirds, and two panels in its lower third; stained a dark brown; this is the main entrance to the building. A new, limestone and concrete ramp for wheelchair accessibility and four concrete steps have been added to that elevation, along with their associated steel pipe handrails, also painted beige. Downspouts have been relocated so that they are no longer at the building corners; instead, they have been placed just beyond the edges of the limestone quoins on each wall.

### ***La Cocina—The Kitchen***

The kitchen was originally constructed in about 1840 as a single room with a fireplace on its north wall.<sup>19</sup> At different times during Navarro's ownership, one room was added to either side of the first room, such that the building became a rectangular volume running north to south, parallel to Laredo Street. It is thought that the north room was used for storage; the original, central room used as the kitchen; and the south room used by the cook or other servants as living quarters. The walls of the kitchen building are a combination of limestone block, rubble, and stucco. Architect Brooks Martin described the rubble construction as "soft limestone, small rocks, and mortar...placed one on the other and allowed to dry prior to placement of stucco and cement, outside and inside."<sup>20</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Neither of these structures were documented in the 1936 HABS drawings nor mentioned in the 1937 HABS report.

<sup>17</sup> Betty Scheibl, "S.A. Conservation Group Fights to Save Casa Navarro," *San Antonio Light*, September 7, 1952. Files of the San Antonio Conservation Society.

<sup>18</sup> Ted Farnes, "Navarro Houses to Stand," *San Antonio Light*, November 25, 1959, 1.

<sup>19</sup> Eickenroht, 1-2.

<sup>20</sup> Martin, "Notes," 3.

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Exterior

The kitchen is 36 feet wide and 18 feet deep, with a hipped roof covered with wood shingles. Both the front (west) and rear (east) elevations of the kitchen feature porches, with their lower, shed roofs supported by unornamented, square columns—five columns on the west porch, and four columns on the east porch. On both sides of the building, the porches span only the central and southern rooms; the northern room of the kitchen, historically used for storage, does not have a porch.<sup>21</sup> The exterior walls are whitewashed, and the wood doors and window sashes are painted the same beige as on the other two contributing buildings. The wood, boxed columns and fascia on the kitchen porches have been painted a dark green, differentiating the utilitarian kitchen building from the Navarro House and Mercantile Building. Wood benches, also painted dark green, are located under both porches. The floors of the porches are Saltillo tile, installed during the 1962 Brooks Martin rehabilitation of the site, and they have been repaired or replaced as needed.

The main elevation of the kitchen faces west, toward the courtyard and its well and cistern. A door is located in the center of the wall, which leads into the kitchen room; a second door is located at the southern (right) side of the main façade, and both doors are sheltered by the overhanging porch roof. A wood 6-over-6 double-hung window is located on the northern (left) side of the front elevation, without the benefit of shade from a porch.

The south and north elevations each have one opening—a centrally located casement window on the south façade, and a door located at the western (right) side of the north façade, which provides direct kitchen access to the well in the courtyard. Today, the 6-over-6-light wood casement window on the south wall is covered with steel bars for security, as Nueva Street is a major thoroughfare.

The east elevation, facing toward what would have been a place for a kitchen garden and fruit or nut trees, features two doors and three windows arranged asymmetrically. The northernmost window is a wood 6-over-6 double-hung sash; to its left is a pair of wood casement windows like those in the Navarro House, and to their left is a wood door that allows entrance into the central kitchen room. Another door is adjacent to the first, entering into the southernmost room, and to its left a wood casement window.

Interior

Visitors to the state historic site can enter the kitchen from the door on its north wall or from the doors under the porch on the east side of the building; inside are new, interpretive exhibits on the community and architecture of the Barrio Laredito during Navarro's time. The central room appears as a functioning kitchen, with a table, benches, food, and cooking utensils, while the other two rooms are more austere, with minimal furnishings and exhibit cases. The interior floors are of the same Saltillo tile as that installed on the porches in 1962. Plaster walls on the interior are all brightly whitewashed. As during the historic period, there is no baseboard trim, but there is a flat, wood chair rail and picture rail, painted beige. The kitchen fireplace does not feature a mantelpiece and is merely whitewashed; its hearth is limestone, slightly higher than the floor. The wood ceiling is unornamented, merely the exposed roof structure, and is stained a dark color.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid. Martin believed that the rear or east porch of the kitchen was constructed around the same time as the bedroom addition on the house, and that the front or west porch of the kitchen was constructed significantly later, around the same time as the west porch of the Navarro House. Martin does not, however, offer dates of construction for any of these porches or additions.

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**Integrity of the Kitchen**

HABS architect Marvin Eickenroht wrote in 1963 that the kitchen was “the only outbuilding ever known to have existed” on the Navarro property during Navarro’s years of ownership.<sup>22</sup> As a utilitarian building—simple rooms for storing and cooking food—the kitchen was unornamented. Typical of the time of construction and their location in San Antonio, none of the three rooms had a finished floor, as today; rather, they were dirt that was swept and occasionally watered. The ceilings were open with their frame structure exposed. Martin observed in 1967: “The amount of grease on the rafters and the underside of the planking and shingles would lead one to believe this had been used as a kitchen for many years.”<sup>23</sup> The rooms of the kitchen building, then as now, did not have any baseboard trim at the bottom of its lime plaster walls; nor was there a decorative wood mantel on the fireplace, as in the house or store. The kitchen’s interior doors all were built-up, vertical board-and-batten.

The kitchen is the building that had the greatest modifications during the Brooks Martin-designed rehabilitation of the Casa Navarro site in 1962, for its new owner, the San Antonio Conservation Society. During this year, the City of San Antonio purchased from SACS a 6-foot-wide strip of the property on its southern edge in order to widen Nueva Street, resulting in the demolition of the southern five feet of the limestone kitchen building and leaving the building five feet narrower than it was originally. A new south wall of the kitchen was constructed of concrete block to replace the demolished wall of limestone rubble, with a replicated window to match the historic; this exterior wall then was covered with stucco to blend with the other historic walls.<sup>24</sup>

Martin also installed a working kitchen and bathrooms in the northern room and established the central room as a dining room for SACS meetings, luncheons, and privately catered parties; up to 30 people could be seated at tables indoors, and 100 people could attend when the patio and courtyard were used.<sup>25</sup> To allow for such events, Saltillo tiles were added to the kitchen porch floors and in the courtyard. While the tiles remain in place on exterior and interior floors, Martin’s working kitchen and bathrooms were removed during subsequent rehabilitation and restoration projects under the state’s ownership, so that today Casa Navarro’s kitchen more accurately reflects the construction and use of the kitchen by José Antonio Navarro and his family. Today, the kitchen as modified and rehabilitated continues to contribute to the overall high integrity of the site as a whole.

**Cistern and Well**

Historic photographs do not exist from Navarro’s occupancy of the buildings and grounds, or from that of his daughter, Joséfa. During Navarro’s lifetime, it is most likely that the courtyard spaces were utilitarian in nature, and therefore did not feature any ornamental plants as we might imagine today. The contributing cistern and well structures likely were surrounded by dirt that was swept, and the family may have had a few trees for shade or for fruit and nuts. The servants or cook likely maintained a kitchen garden on the property, but documentation is lacking.

<sup>22</sup> Eickenroht, 5. It should be noted that, in Figure 10 of this nomination—an oblique view of the southeast elevations of the Navarro Store, taken in 1936—there were at least two other outbuildings on the property between the office and the kitchen.

<sup>23</sup> Martin, “Notes,” 3.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. A wood fence along Nueva Street and a wood frame lean-to next to the office also were demolished at this time. Martin notes the work done to construct the new wall and other modifications to the kitchen and other buildings in an August 23, 1962, letter to Mrs. W.S. Hamlin, President, San Antonio Conservation Society.

<sup>25</sup> Nelda Courts, “Historic Home Restored to 1850 Authenticity,” *San Antonio Light*, January 17, 1965. The “Cocina Navarro,” run by SACS volunteers, offered light meals, desserts, and drinks out of the kitchen; see also “Cocina Navarro” menu in the SACS archival collections.

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The cistern is bell-shaped, 16 feet deep and 9 feet in diameter at its widest point; it flares out approximately 30 inches below grade and starts to taper at 9 feet below grade. In September 2009, the Texas Historical Commission hired Curtis Hunt Restoration to evaluate the historic cistern. The company's report found it to be in very good condition and stated that it either was constructed of sandstone or simply cut into the caliche bedrock. The stone interior of the cistern did not exhibit any signs of failure or cracks, and it had at least two layers of plaster in very good condition.<sup>26</sup> Historically, the cistern was connected to a downspout on the house and could hold approximately 2,000 gallons of water, accessible by a hand-powered pump mechanism.

The well is lined with stone that extended approximately 2 feet above ground, appearing as a round construction of rubble limestone, with two stone posts or columns rising a further 2 feet, topped with stone spheres. During Navarro's residency, it is likely that the well would have been open to the air and later covered with lumber or sheet metal. At some point in the early twentieth century, the well opening was covered by a conical cap of concrete, which has since been removed.

**Noncontributing Building-- Restroom and Maintenance Shed**

The building containing public restrooms and a maintenance shed for staff is located along the rear (eastern) wall of the property. Designed by Fisher Heck Architects to face west into the courtyard, the building appears as three detached rooms that share a concrete slab foundation and a large, overhanging, standing-seam metal roof. The roof is an asymmetrical trapezoid in plan, with its north and south edges parallel but of different lengths; this results in the roof overhang being deeper on the south end of the building, creating a sheltering porch of varying depth along the major façade. Five slender columns of steel pipe support the porch roof, and the concrete porch floor follows the angle of the roof above it. All of the three individual rooms volumes are clad in a horizontal cedar siding, which is stained.

The northern room is the men's restroom, over which the roof overhang is the shallowest. The men's room is accessible by a door on its south wall. The women's restroom is the central room, separated from the men's restroom and the workshop by open, breezeway space. The women's restroom is larger than the men's room and is accessible by a door on its north wall. The wood doors of both restrooms are glazed in their upper halves and are stained a dark color. The largest room is the maintenance room on the south, which serves as a functioning workshop for site staff. It is accessible by a barn door of vertical boards with a Z-brace extending from the upper right to the lower left of the door; the door slides open along an upper track. Another wood door, hinged on the left side, opens into the workshop from its southern wall. A second barn door slides across the open space between the women's room and the workshop, closing off a storage space with a U-shaped configuration of shelving along its walls. Drinking fountains are installed along the west-facing wall outside the women's restroom, sheltered by the porch roof.

**Noncontributing Structure – Wall**

The property is defined on its north, northeast, east, and south sides by a rubble limestone wall that was constructed sometime in the 1950s. Between the Mercantile Building and the kitchen, the wall is low and topped with cedar pickets to keep out after-hours visitors. In June 2012, a colorful mural depicting nineteenth-century life in the historic Laredito neighborhood, designed and executed in glazed tiles by local artists Jesse Treviño and Elizabeth Rodriguez, was unveiled on the wall facing Nueva Street. This new decorative mural, 50 feet long and 8 feet high, does not detract from the visitor's experience of the historic site.

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<sup>26</sup> Curtis Hunt Restoration, "Casa Navarro Cistern: Restoration Notes." September 9, 2009. Files of the Texas Historical Commission.

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**Summary Statement of Integrity**

Casa Navarro, overall, retains a high degree of integrity, with all contributing buildings and structures recently rehabilitated or restored. Although the neighborhood has changed dramatically over more than one hundred years, such that these three small, historic buildings are now surrounded by tall buildings and concrete parking lots, they continue to preserve the historic location, scale, feeling, and association of the Laredito barrio during the first four decades of Texas' statehood. As a functioning museum, the interpretive exhibits recently installed throughout the site and its buildings convey the life and work of Tejano merchant, rancher, statesman, and historian José Antonio Navarro. Many of the new exhibits are interactive, allowing visitors—especially school groups—the opportunity to touch objects in the house and kitchen, to listen to recordings of Navarro's writings, and to utilize the cistern's hand pump, make adobe bricks, or learn about plants in the kitchen garden. The Texas Historical Commission, which held its grand re-opening event on February 25, 2012, is committed to interpreting and maintaining the site based upon its historic period of significance. Friends of Casa Navarro, a nonprofit organization, also supports educational events and ongoing care of the site.

Today, the courtyard is covered with crushed or decomposed granite, which has an earthy, reddish-orange color, although in Navarro's time it likely would have been merely swept dirt. Between the buildings are walkways of roughly rectangular slabs of limestone of various sizes, newly constructed during the 2011 rehabilitation. The slabs are placed directly into the ground without mortar between them. Limestone blocks also line a new concrete sidewalk that extends along the Nueva Street side of the courtyard between the Mercantile Building and the kitchen. New concrete sidewalks have been poured around the north and east sides of the kitchen building and around the new public restroom facility. The sidewalks are lined with limestone slabs of different sizes, or in some locations are interspersed with bricks incised with the names of donors who contributed to the historic site's restoration.

Large trees, including live oaks, provide shade for visitors to the site, and beds full of colorful, drought-tolerant native plants have been placed at the edges of the buildings facing the courtyard; irregularly shaped limestone chunks define these beds. There also are ornamental plants in pots scattered throughout the site. Although it is not likely that the Navarro family would have planted an abundance of ornamentals around their house, commercial property, or kitchen, it is possible that they would have had some plants in pots. Today, a garden has been planted at the southeast corner of the site, between the kitchen and the noncontributing restroom building; staff may cultivate this functioning kitchen garden so that visitors can get a sense of what residents of the Laredito neighborhood were growing and eating during the mid-nineteenth century.

An arbor structure was installed during the Brooks Martin rehabilitation in 1962, but there is no conclusive evidence that an arbor was located along the eastern edge of the property during Navarro's residency. The arbor was maintained until recently, when the Texas Historical Commission, during its 2011 rehabilitation of the site, created a new arbor structure running east to west between the new public restroom building and the east porch of the kitchen.



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**8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

Nationally: X Statewide:    Locally:   

## Applicable National

Register Criteria:

A X B X C    D   

## Criteria Considerations

(Exceptions):

A    B    C    D    E    F    G   

## NHL Criteria:

2

## NHL Theme(s):

III. Expressing Cultural Values

1. Educational and intellectual currents

IV. Shaping the Political Landscape

4. Political ideas, cultures, and theories

## Areas of Significance:

Ethnic Heritage—Hispanic

## Period(s) of Significance:

ca. 1855–1871

## Significant Dates:

ca. 1855, 1871 (representing the beginning of Navarro's full-time residence, the completion of the buildings, and his death in the house).

## Significant Person(s):

Navarro, José Antonio

## Cultural Affiliation:

N/A

## Architect/Builder:

unknown

## Historic Contexts:

*American Latinos and the Making of the United States: A Theme Study*

V. Political and Military Affairs, 1783-1860

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**State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.****Summary**

Casa Navarro is nationally significant under NHL Criterion 2 as the home of Tejano<sup>27</sup> statesman and historian José Antonio Navarro (1795-1871). Born under Spanish colonial rule in the town of Béxar, Navarro's life and career spanned four sovereign nations—Spain, Mexico, the Republic of Texas, and the United States—intertwined by wars and revolutions. No matter which of these flags flew above San Antonio, Navarro was an outstanding advocate for Tejano rights and interests, which he achieved through his political activities, his persuasive speeches, and his writings over four decades. Today, it is the best-preserved, surviving historic property in its original location that is directly associated with José Antonio Navarro.

A staunch supporter of an independent Texas, Navarro was one of two native Texans to sign the Texas Declaration of Independence on March 2, 1836. He continued as a political leader of the Republic of Texas, serving one term (1838-39) in its House of Representatives. Navarro was the sole Tejano delegate to the 1845 constitutional convention that approved annexation of Texas by the United States. During the convention, he fought to protect Tejanos' citizenship rights using his persuasive gifts as an orator.

During the 1850s—the period considered “the height of his fame and influence”—Navarro wrote and published two important historical essays, making him “the first Tejano, and the first native-born historian of Texas.”<sup>28</sup> Written in Spanish and translated into English for publication in San Antonio newspapers in 1853 and 1857-58, the essays described the heroic efforts of Tejanos during the Mexican struggle for independence from Spain and served as a direct counter to typical Anglo accounts of the period, which reviled Texans of Mexican descent and rejected the Mexican history and heritage of Texas, commonly suggesting that Texas began a period of decline after Mexican independence.<sup>29</sup> These historical essays were collected in 1869 and published as *Apuntes históricos interesantes de San Antonio de Béxar* (“Commentaries of Historical Interest on San Antonio de Béxar”). Navarro's writings intersect with the period of significance for Casa Navarro. His full-time residency at the property began in about 1855, shortly after publication of his December 1853 essay, but before the 1857-58 newspaper publications. The period of significance ends with Navarro's death in the one-story house on the property in 1871, following the 1869 publication of his collected essays.

Located in a San Antonio neighborhood once known as Laredito (“Little Laredo”), Casa Navarro consists of three contributing buildings—Navarro's house and a free-standing kitchen, both constructed in about 1840, and a two-story mercantile and office building, constructed by 1856. Entered into the National Register of Historic Places in March 1972, Casa Navarro is the only extant resource associated with the life of José Antonio Navarro.

<sup>27</sup> “Tejano” refers to Texans of Spanish and Mexican descent, beginning in the Spanish colonial era and continuing through the present.

<sup>28</sup> James E. Crisp, “José Antonio Navarro: The Problem of Tejano Powerlessness,” in Jesús de la Teja, ed., *Tejano Leadership in Mexican and Revolutionary Texas* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2010), 148-160; also see David McDonald, *José Antonio Navarro: In Search of the American Dream in Nineteenth Century Texas* (Denton: Texas State Historical Association, 2010), 8.

<sup>29</sup> David R. McDonald and Timothy M. Matovina, “Preface,” in José Antonio Navarro, *Defending Mexican Valor in Texas: José Antonio Navarro's Historical Writings, 1853-1857*, edited by David R. McDonald and Timothy M. Matovina (Abilene: State House Press, 1995), 11-13.



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**The Early Life of José Antonio Navarro**

The life of José Antonio Navarro was rooted in San Antonio de Béxar, an eighteenth-century settlement of New Spain that is the heart of the present-day city of San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas. The San Antonio de Béxar Presidio was founded in 1718 as the center of defense in western Texas, a province of New Spain. The presidio was located across the San Antonio River from the San Antonio de Valero Mission, also established in 1718 as one of five Franciscan missions. (The Mission de Valero later would become known as the Alamo). That same year of 1718, the Spanish governor Martín de Alarcón attempted to establish a nearby civilian settlement that he called Villa de Béxar ("Town of Béxar"), but it remained barely populated over the next several years. The Spanish crown, wanting more than a mere military encampment at this location, sought to encourage settlement in the villa by transferring families from the Canary Islands to Texas. In 1731, 15 families came from the islands and established a new villa between the San Antonio River and San Pedro Creek, to the east of the presidio and to the west of the mission. The presidio would protect the new settlers and its *acequia* (irrigation ditch) would help establish the community's agricultural fields. This new villa was named San Fernando de Béxar; by the end of the eighteenth century, the presidio, the mission, and the villa had grown into a community commonly identified as "Béxar."<sup>30</sup>

José Antonio Navarro's father, Ángel Navarro, established himself as a merchant in Béxar in 1777. He had left his family home on the island of Corsica in 1762, at the age of thirteen or fourteen, to find opportunity in the Italian port city of Genoa. After some time there, he traveled west to Spain, where he found employment as a servant in Barcelona and then in Cádiz. Around 1768, Navarro sailed to New Spain as an indentured servant and spent eight years working for his freedom in the silver mining region between Laredo and Monterrey. He then relocated to the northern town of Béxar, in the Spanish province of Texas.

In a relatively short time, Ángel Navarro made his mark in Béxar as a prosperous merchant dealing in trade goods and slaves. He purchased a house on Real (later Flores) Street near the center of the city and was first elected to the city council in 1781. Between 1781 and 1807, Ángel Navarro was elected to serve as *alcalde* (mayor) or assistant *alcalde* four times and served several times as an alderman in Béxar. Navarro and his wife, María Gertrudis Joséfa Ruíz y Peña, welcomed their eighth child, José Antonio, on February 27, 1795. By the time of José Antonio's birth, only two of the Navarros' other children had survived epidemic disease—a boy, José Ángel, age 11; and a girl, María Joséfa, age 3.<sup>31</sup>

José Antonio Navarro was raised in Béxar, living both in his parents' home and in the home of his maternal grandparents on the opposite side of Real Street. His mother's brother, José Francisco Ruíz, who briefly had served as schoolmaster at the public school, mentored young José Antonio until he left home in 1805 to continue his private education in Saltillo, a mercantile center of northeastern New Spain. While in Saltillo, thirteen-year-old José Antonio suffered an unknown injury that fractured his left leg, causing him to walk with a distinctive limp for the rest of his life. During the summer of 1808, he returned to Béxar to begin work in his father's store. Ángel Navarro died just a few months later, in October 1808, and was the first person interred in the new cemetery, Campo Santo, to the west of San Pedro Creek.<sup>32</sup> José Antonio continued to work in the Navarro store after his father's death, but he also continued his education, studying law informally with his uncle Ruíz, who then was serving as city attorney, prosecutor, and a voting member of the city council. Biographer David McDonald suggests that this introduction to municipal government and its legal processes,

<sup>30</sup> Jesús F. de la Teja, *San Antonio de Béxar: A Community on New Spain's Northern Frontier* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 7-15, 17-29, 31-40.

<sup>31</sup> McDonald, 12-15.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 16-17; also Crisp, 148.

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through Ruíz, was the basis for Navarro's later service in the legislatures of Mexico, the Republic of Texas, and the state of Texas, as well as two Texas constitutional conventions.<sup>33</sup>

Navarro also may have been influenced to choose a life in politics and government by Juan Martín de Veramendi, who married his sister María Joséfa in 1810, when Navarro was 15 years old. At that time, Veramendi was ascending through the ranks of local government, and he later would become governor of the northeastern-most state of Mexico, Coahuila y Tejas. Replacing José Antonio's father as mentors, Ruíz and Veramendi became Navarro's closest friends and greatest influences, sharing political ideals and a strong desire for economic success. During these important years of transition from childhood to adulthood, Navarro also witnessed tremendous changes on an international scale, including the expansion of the United States through the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, Napoleon's invasion of Spain in 1808, and the subsequent Mexican Revolution, which began in 1810 and resulted in Mexico's independence from Spain in 1821.<sup>34</sup>

In Béxar, the first stirrings of revolution occurred late in 1810 as local leaders, including Ruíz and Veramendi, conspired to overthrow Governor Manuel María de Salcedo. Fifteen-year-old Navarro, from his family's home on Real Street near the Main Plaza, witnessed the coup that removed Salcedo and his officials from the governor's quarters on January 22, 1811. When describing this event in his 1857 historical commentary, Navarro recalled it as "the first occasion in which the Mexicans of San Antonio de Béxar announced their desire to break forever the chains of their ancient colonial slavery."<sup>35</sup> Over the next two years, much blood was shed in battles at La Bahía, Salado Creek (also known as the Battle of Rosillo), Alazán, and Medina. Thousands of people were killed—Spaniards, Mexicans, and American allies—yet Spain retained its power. On August 18, 1813, the royalist army was victorious at Medina and, as a result, Bexareños who had sided with the insurgents fled toward the northeast in hopes of reaching Louisiana. Eighteen-year-old José Antonio Navarro joined this flight into exile, even though his brother José Ángel had fought with the royalists.

In Louisiana, Navarro, with his uncle Ruíz and his sister and brother-in-law Veramendi and their children, lived among other exiled Tejanos for more than two years, until the exiles were pardoned by the Spanish consulate in New Orleans on October 15, 1815. Freed of all charges as revolutionaries and accusations of disloyalty, Navarro and the Veramendis reclaimed their homes in Béxar despite significant losses of other personal property. Ruíz, not trusting the Spanish pardon, chose to remain in Louisiana until Mexican independence was achieved in 1821. While Veramendi took possession of his family house at the end of 1815, Navarro did not return to Béxar until 1816, at 21 years of age. His brother José Ángel served on the Béxar city council in 1815 and 1816 and, with their family estate saved, Navarro was able to begin his life anew with relative security. He and Margarita de la Garza welcomed their first child, a daughter, in the spring of 1817. Although the Navarro family store was lost during his time in exile, Navarro resumed his business as a trader, often dealing with others in Louisiana and Texas in contraband—horses, common household items, textiles and clothing, and tobacco. These dealings eventually led to Navarro's imprisonment in Béxar, from July 1819 until March 1821. During this time, Navarro wrote numerous petitions for his freedom to the governor; he also gained important insight into legal processes and a deeper understanding of the workings of a constitutional government, which he carried with him into the next phase of his life.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> McDonald, 17.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 18-19.

<sup>35</sup> McDonald and Matovina, eds., 68; also Crisp, 149.

<sup>36</sup> McDonald, 28-49.

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**Navarro, Tejano Statesman**

In July 1821, after more than a decade of conflict and bloodshed, the people of Mexico were able to celebrate their independence from Spanish rule. The resulting political reforms brought about significant changes to Texas, Mexico's northeastern-most state, including the approval of new immigrants from the United States and the establishment of a new trading port at La Bahía de San Bernardo, near today's city of Goliad. At this time the northern frontier of Mexico, particularly Texas, was sparsely populated; fewer than 4,000 Mexican citizens lived there, although various Indian tribes and bands—considered a threat by most Mexicans and Anglo-Americans—also claimed these lands.

In an effort to strengthen its northern frontier against Indian attacks and establish more settlements, the Mexican government opened Texas to groups of American colonists. Recognizing that new colonists would improve the economy, Navarro and other leaders of Béxar, the Mexican state's administrative center, supported the petition of Moses Austin, an American lead mining entrepreneur and debtor, to bring 300 families to settle in Texas. In 1821, Austin received this permission—and a land grant from Governor Antonio María Martínez. Moses Austin died before he was able to establish his colony, and his son Stephen F. Austin, heir to his father's land grant, expanded upon his father's colonization plan. Stephen F. Austin wanted to bring even more than 300 Americans to establish his colony. He and Navarro, who had become familiar with Americans during his exile in Louisiana, forged a friendship over the ensuing years as Austin's colony took hold in Texas. Stephen F. Austin and José Antonio Navarro shared a dream of a prosperous and populous Texas, as well as an agreement that slave labor would be a component of the colonization plan.<sup>37</sup>

In December 1821, Navarro was elected to serve as the *regidor* (first-ranked councilman) in the new government of Texas. By March 1822, he was the acting *alcade* (mayor) at Béxar, presiding over the legal process of conciliation to resolve civil cases. He served in this capacity until August, and then served as acting second *alcade*, the liaison between the council and the governor. His connections to the higher ranks of government allowed Navarro to increase his business as a trader, and he and his family prospered, including the birth of a second daughter that December. Navarro's brother José Ángel and his brother-in-law Juan Martín de Veramendi also secured political appointments.

Yet, as Navarro personally prospered in Béxar, the years following Mexico's independence were full of political turmoil. In May 1822, the sovereign congress named General Agustín de Iturbide as the first constitutional emperor of Mexico, and he was crowned in a coronation in Mexico City that July. Within a few months, however, criticisms of the emperor's policies grew to such a point that he dissolved the congress; this action enraged General Antonio López de Santa Anna, commander of the garrison at Veracruz, and by December 1, 1822, Santa Anna and his troops revolted against the emperor and proclaimed Mexico a republic. In Béxar, the council had voted to support the emperor, but quickly realized that it had made a mistake and isolated itself from the rest of Mexico. By April 1823, it was clear that the Mexican government was in upheaval, and Navarro, as an established merchant, was elected to represent the trading port of La Bahía<sup>38</sup> on the *junta* (citizens' council) as it worked to improve relations with Santa Anna. Navarro's role was to learn more about the nation's general opinion of the new republican government by exchanging letters and ideas with other leaders. In June 1823, Navarro and two other junta members wrote two letters to Santa Anna, in which they explained how Béxar had declared its loyalty to the emperor in March without enough information, but it had reversed course and accepted the *Plan de Casa Mata* on April 15, becoming the first council to officially

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 49-56; also Crisp, 150.

<sup>38</sup> The trading port of La Bahía de San Bernardo was located near the Presidio de la Bahía, an eighteenth-century Spanish military fort. It was situated on the San Antonio River, about 100 miles southeast of Béxar and 50 miles inland of the Gulf of Mexico. These historic sites are located near the contemporary Texas city of Goliad, in Goliad County.

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support the republic. By July the political structure of Béxar was restored to its prior form—its *ayuntamiento* (municipal council) reporting to a newly appointed governor. Meanwhile, Stephen F. Austin returned to continue discussions to establish his colony. During the next few years, Navarro continued to build his relationship with Austin and expand his trading and political networks.<sup>39</sup>

*Anglos*<sup>40</sup> from the southern United States, hoping to settle in Texas, wanted to bring their slaves with them. The continuation of slavery in Texas was controversial. The Mexican Constitution of 1824 outlined immigration and land distribution generally, allowing the states to make their own laws. When a constitution for the state of Coahuila y Texas was written in Saltillo in 1827, Article 13 stated that no person could be born a slave in the state, and that slaves could not be imported. Navarro and Stephen F. Austin did not agree with this position because they thought slaves were necessary to support the cotton economy of the new immigrant colonies. Because Navarro was elected in 1827 as a deputy to the state legislature and served on the Committee of Colonization, he was able to introduce and pass a contract labor law that allowed colonists to bring their slaves into Texas under “supposedly voluntary indenture agreements signed outside of Mexico.”<sup>41</sup> Thus, Navarro, Austin and his Tejano supporters were able to allow slaves in Texas. In 1829, when the Mexican president issued a degree abolishing slavery, Navarro and his supporters worked against laws that prohibited slavery and the further import of them. Navarro had, in fact, been born into a household with three slaves, and he would continue to own slaves until their emancipation during the American Civil War.<sup>42</sup>

In 1831, Navarro was appointed Land Commissioner of the Green DeWitt colony at Gonzales, an important position that gave him the power to issue land titles in Mexican Texas. This also gave him a more immediate perspective on the problems associated with the rising tide of immigrants, as Anglo-American colonists quickly began to outnumber Tejanos.<sup>43</sup> At the DeWitt colony, Navarro worked to transfer land to 162 immigrant families, dealing with surveys and property disputes.<sup>44</sup> He also used his appointment and connections to secure land for himself, establishing a ranch on the Atascosa River twenty miles south of San Antonio, as well as for his family, including his brother-in-law Veramendi, who became governor in 1832. These years were very busy for Navarro, as he continued to operate his mercantile business and began another career as a rancher. In 1832 he also purchased the city lot on Laredo Street—now known as Casa Navarro. In 1834, Navarro purchased an additional ranch property at San Geronimo, seven miles north of today’s city of Seguin, which allowed him to grow his family’s fortunes even further. But these years also brought personal tragedy, as his confidant Veramendi and his family died in a cholera epidemic in 1833; the disease then came to Béxar in the spring of 1834, killing Navarro’s grandmother and mother, causing him to take his family to the Atascosa Ranch for three months to escape the outbreak.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>39</sup> McDonald, 57-68.

<sup>40</sup> “Anglos” or “Anglo-Americans” are Americans of European descent, as distinguished from Latino or Hispanic descent. Although this word is the same as that in the term “Anglo-Saxon,” today it is not commonly used outside of the southwestern United States, where it specifically used in reference to whites, or non-Latinos.

<sup>41</sup> McDonald, 77-79; also Crisp, 150-151.

<sup>42</sup> Crisp, 151.

<sup>43</sup> The surge of Anglo-American colonists brought with it a rise in discrimination against Tejanos and struggles between Anglo land speculators and Tejanos who had legal claim to lands dating back to the Spanish crown. Between 1833 and 1835, one thousand Anglo-Americans were relocating to Texas each month and, by 1835, the Anglo population was approximately 30,000 to just 3,000 Tejanos—a ratio of 10 to 1. This ratio remained the same after the Texas Revolution, when in 1836 there were 35,000 Anglo-American residents and their slaves, and 3,500 Tejanos living in the new republic. See H.W. Brands, *Lone Star Nation* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 246-247; and Roberto R. Calderón, “Tejano Politics,” *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/wmtkn>).

<sup>44</sup> McDonald, 104.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 110-117.

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In 1833, Santa Anna was elected president of Mexico as a liberal; by 1834, however, he established himself as an autocratic centralist. Stating that Mexico was not ready for democracy, Santa Anna dissolved the congress, overturned the constitution established in 1824, and dismissed all state legislatures and governors—thus beginning his campaign of oppression. Chaos came to the nation, and civil war seemed imminent. Tejanos in Béxar, including Navarro, were faced with two choices—support of the Anglo-American colonists who now outnumbered them and were asserting their dominance, or rule by Santa Anna's centralist regime. By 1835, Texas was on the path to revolution as tensions rose among those in power. The Navarro brothers were united in their hope for “a federalist government based upon popular sovereignty,”<sup>46</sup> which put them in opposition to Santa Anna. Navarro's brother José Ángel kept his position as alcalde of Béxar and assumed additional leadership when the term ended for Béxar's political chief, Juan Seguín, who then called out the local militia to assist in defending the state's federalist government from Santa Anna. The war came to Béxar, resulting in a siege that saw a victory for the insurgents. Led by Benjamin Milam, the insurgents took provisions at Navarro's house and occupied the former Veramendi house, where another of Navarro's brothers, Luciano, now lived with his family. Milam was the only Anglo killed in the siege, and the Mexican forces retreated to Saltillo on December 13, 1835.<sup>47</sup>

On February 1, 1836, as the revolt against Santa Anna continued, Tejanos gathered in the Alamo to elect representatives from Béxar to a constitutional convention. More than eighty people voted and elected José Antonio Navarro and his uncle, José Francisco Ruíz. Anglo volunteers at the Alamo also demanded representation, and they elected Samuel Maverick and Jesse Badgett.<sup>48</sup> Navarro and Ruíz left Béxar on February 20 for the constitutional convention to be held at Washington-on-the-Brazos. They traveled along the Camino Real for eight days under the protection of four soldiers, at the order of Colonel William B. Travis. The constitutional convention began on March 1, with forty-four delegates representing twenty Texas towns; more delegates arrived in the following days. On March 2, a draft of the Texas Declaration of Independence was read to the convention, and it was unanimously approved and adopted without changes. On March 3, Navarro and Ruíz signed the Declaration of Independence—the only Tejanos to do so. As the convention rested, the battle for independence from Mexico raged on. Back in Béxar, the Alamo, under siege by Santa Anna's troops since February 23, was lost on March 6.<sup>49</sup> On March 7, Navarro was part of a committee that gathered to begin writing the constitution for the new Republic of Texas, which was based upon the United States Constitution and those of other states. The delegates adopted the document on March 16. While Navarro participated in discussions, he had little to do with its writing; however, he would make more significant contributions to the language of the Texas Constitution in the future.<sup>50</sup>

With Texas independence secured following the Battle of San Jacinto on April 21, 1836, Navarro continued as a political leader of the Republic of Texas, serving one term (1838-39) in the House of Representatives of its third Congress; besides Senator Juan Seguín from Béxar, Navarro was the only Tejano elected. In his role as representative, Navarro acted to protect the rights of Tejanos to their legacy land claims, which often were disputed in the courts. At the time, the law mandated that all incomplete, pending, or non-existent land titles reverted to the public domain, where they could be claimed by any man with a headright certificate. Navarro and Seguín prepared a bill authorizing the General Land Office to issue land titles to Tejanos whose title documentation was incomplete, either due to its being lost, stolen, or destroyed in the archives, or because of

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 128. Navarro, 40 years old at this time, never took up arms in these conflicts.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 119-127.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>49</sup> Tejanos fought and died alongside the Anglo-American volunteers at the Alamo. Francisco Ruiz, Navarro's cousin, was charged with identifying the bodies of those slain, and he counted their number at 182. See L. Lloyd MacDonald, *Tejanos in the 1835 Texas Revolution* (Gretna, Louisiana: The Pelican Publishing Company, 2009), 215.

<sup>50</sup> MacDonald., 130-134.



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war. In his native Spanish language, Navarro implored the Speaker of the House and his fellow legislators to consider the families whose land tenure dated back to grants from the Spanish government:

These persons have continued undisturbed to hold and to cultivate the lands thus obtained and so ancient. So well-known and unquestionable have been their possession rights that the property has been inherited from the father to the sons, and to the grand-children of the original holders.... I ask, Sir, will this government be so rigorous—will our laws be so unjust as to deprive such persons of their property, because through unforeseen and unavoidable accidents, they are not provided with documentary proof of title to their lands? No, Sir—law and equity have everywhere provided a remedy for such accidents.... The unfortunate people alluded to cannot come forward with their titles. They know nothing of the forms necessary to their defense; nor even anything of the very language in which they are called on to defend themselves.<sup>51</sup>

Navarro described speculators and the new Anglo settlers as people “hungry for land,” who calculated “on their skill in the chicanery of the existing laws, as well as on the helpless ignorance of the innocent.” In anticipation of his opponents’ assertions that Tejanos could claim their land rights in the courts, Navarro stated that the court of law was not accessible to most Tejanos because of legal intimidation, prohibitive expense, and the complexity of the judicial system. Despite his impassioned speech, this proposed legislation did not pass.<sup>52</sup>

Navarro was elected to a second term in the Texas House of Representatives in 1839, but he chose not to serve because he wanted to leave the capital and return home to San Antonio.<sup>53</sup> After spending some time building a new house on his San Geronimo Ranch, Navarro was convinced by President Mirabeau Lamar to serve as a commissioner on an 1841 expedition to Santa Fe, which would prove to be disastrous. Lamar expected that the military and commercial enterprise would open trade between Texas and New Mexico and establish Texan control of the Santa Fe area. Texas had claimed older settlements along the upper Rio Grande as part of its new republic. The expedition failed, however, after the group of more than 300 volunteers mistook the Wichita River for the Red River and got lost; they were deserted by their guides and attacked by Indians, and their supplies dwindled to almost nothing. Upon arrival in New Mexico, instead of being welcomed, the expedition volunteers were arrested and imprisoned. Navarro reportedly told his captors: “I have sworn to be a free Texan, and I will never foreswear.”<sup>54</sup> He and the other volunteers were marched to Mexico City, where they were imprisoned by Santa Anna. Most of the American-born Texans were released later in 1842, but as a Tejano—and a former citizen of Mexico—Navarro was tried and convicted of treason, and imprisoned in Veracruz under brutal conditions in the fortress of San Juan de Ulúa, where he was chained to the floor. In January 1845, Navarro escaped with the assistance of an officer, and he sailed to Havana, Cuba, arriving just in time to board the *New York* to New Orleans. There, he received lodging and medical care before sailing to the Texas port of Galveston and traveling onward to his home in San Antonio.<sup>55</sup>

Already respected and esteemed among Tejanos, Navarro now garnered the further respect of many other Texans who viewed the former prisoner as a true patriot. They elected him as the sole Tejano delegate to the July 1845 Constitutional Convention that approved annexation of Texas by the United States. Despite considerable anti-Tejano sentiment among Anglo Texans at this time, Navarro was appointed to the

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 153-154.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. The English translation of Navarro’s speech was published on January 29, 1839, in the *Houston Telegraph and Texas Register*, but by that time the Third Congress had adjourned.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 150-156. The City of Béxar became known as “San Antonio” after Texas won its independence. A charter incorporating the city of San Antonio was approved by the Congress of the Republic of Texas on December 14, 1837. By the end of 1838, a second piece of legislation officially renamed the City of Béxar as the City of San Antonio.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 172.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 175-202.

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convention's Executive Committee and through his participation was able to preserve Tejano rights in the new state constitution. Navarro worked to strengthen the civil rights of Tejanos by speaking out to keep the word "white," in reference to race, out of the Texas Constitution. It had been proposed that only the "free white population" would have the right to vote. Navarro boldly spoke against this: "[I]f the word *white* means anything at all, it means a great deal, and if it does not mean anything at all it is entirely superfluous, as well as odious, and, if you please, ridiculous.... [Tejanos] are unquestionably entitled to vote." He continued to argue that the word *white* be struck from the document, saying that the term was "odious, captious, and redundant; and may be the means at elections of disqualifying persons who are legal voters, but who perhaps by arbitrary judges may not be considered white."<sup>56</sup> Navarro and his allies proved successful in this debate, and the Constitution was unanimously approved on August 28, 1845—and it did not contain a single provision that discriminated against Tejanos. Navarro also ensured that Spanish translations of the documents and proceedings were made available for his constituents.

Thus, with his allies in the legislature, Navarro not only protected the voting rights of Tejano citizens, but also was able to make the proceedings accessible to them. As he advocated for his people, Navarro played a distinctive role in the unique story of Texas—one of only two states recognized as a sovereign nation before its admission to the Union.<sup>57</sup> Tejanos like Navarro were as much a part of the story as the Anglo newcomers, though, as historian Ramón A. Gutiérrez pointed out in the National Historic Landmark theme study, *American Latinos and the Making of the United States*, they often were "intentionally erase[d]" from the prevailing narrative.<sup>58</sup> In the years after Texas statehood, Navarro would work, as well, to correct that omission.

After Texas entered into the Union on December 29, 1845, the citizens of San Antonio elected Navarro as their senator in the first state legislature. Drawing upon his past experience as a land commissioner in the Texas colonies, he continued to defend the interests of his people. Senator Navarro argued against laws that enabled land forfeitures and disallowed alien land ownership:

[N]either conquest nor division of empire can annul vested individual rights of property; hence a person who held real estate in Texas when it separated from Mexico, although he has not since become a citizen of Texas, has still, during his life, a vested right to that property, which the mere change of government has not impaired.... If the alien of a certain class has in law and equity a peculiar vested right, he cannot be divested of it merely as an alien.<sup>59</sup>

In May 1846, the legislature passed a bill creating Navarro County, which bordered the Brazos River to the south of Dallas County. Named in honor of José Antonio Navarro, the new county was carved from the western part of the previously established Robinson County. The Navarro County seat was named Corsicana, in honor of the statesman's Corsican roots through his father, Ángel Navarro. José Antonio Navarro served a second term in the Texas Senate, voting on issues including the establishment of public schools throughout the state. When the last session of the second legislature ended on March 20, 1848, Navarro was "at the zenith of his political career."<sup>60</sup> He had served in three legislative bodies under three different nations between 1827 and 1848, and he would remain a noted public figure with lasting political influence through his friendships and connections—and through the publication of his historical essays in the 1850s.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 212-213.

<sup>57</sup> The other state is Hawaii, which the United States recognized first as a kingdom, then a Republic, before finally annexing it in 1898.

<sup>58</sup> Ramón A. Gutiérrez, "The Latino Crucible: Its Origins in 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Wars, Revolutions, and Empire," in *American Latinos and the Making of the United States: A Theme Study* (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 2013), 41.

<sup>59</sup> McDonald, 244.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 233.

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**Navarro, the First Tejano Historian**

While other Tejano patriots and politicians—including Juan Nepomuceno Seguín, Navarro's cousin Francisco Antonio Ruíz, and José Antonio Menchaca—also wrote their memoirs and accounts of their people's history, Navarro is recognized as the first Tejano historian.<sup>61</sup> In his writings, Navarro provided a response to the dominant Anglo-American narratives of Texas history in the mid-nineteenth century, which offered stories of a period of decline under Mexican rule and cast only the Anglo newcomers as Texas patriots.<sup>62</sup> While he had written in private correspondence about events that took place during the Mexican War of Independence from Spain, Navarro did not prepare any essays or historical accounts for publication until 1853, when he wrote a response to an article published on September 15, 1853, in the *San Antonio Ledger*.<sup>63</sup> The *Ledger* article offered a common narrative for its time—an account of Mexican decline followed by redemption brought to Texas by Anglo-Americans.<sup>64</sup>

Navarro took issue with the *Ledger* article and responded with an essay that was the first of a series of historical commentaries spread over five years. His October 30, 1853, essay, written in Spanish, was translated into English and published on December 1, 1853, in the *Western Texan*, a competitor of the *San Antonio Ledger*.

<sup>61</sup> Crisp, 148; also see McDonald, 8. Crisp, McDonald, and Timothy Matovina all argue for Navarro's status as the first Tejano historian, publishing first in 1853 and again in 1857. Juan Nepomuceno Seguín (1806-1890), a military leader during the Texas Revolution and a legislator during the early years of the Texas Republic, published his *Personal Memoirs of John N. Seguín* (San Antonio: Ledger Book and Job Office, 1858) in 1858, after the publication of Navarro's second historical essay. Seguín, who led a battalion of Tejano soldiers in the Battle of San Jacinto, later served in the second, third, and fourth congresses of the Texas Republic. While serving as mayor of San Antonio in 1842, Seguín was accused of land speculation and of betrayal of the failed Santa Fe Expedition of which Navarro had been a part; from these and other recriminations as a traitor, Seguín fled to Mexico, where he lived in exile for six years before returning to Texas, where he carefully reentered local politics. See *A Revolution Remembered: The Memoirs and Selected Correspondence of Juan N. Seguín*, edited by Jesús de la Teja (Austin: State House Press, 1991). Navarro's cousin, Francisco Antonio Ruíz (1804-1876), the son of his beloved uncle Ruíz, published his memoirs in *The Texas Almanac for 1860* and in "The Story of the Fall of the Alamo" in the *San Antonio Light*, March 6, 1886; like those of Navarro, these are the recollections of a non-combatant observer to important conflicts. The younger Ruíz served as the *alcade* of San Antonio during the Texas Revolution and was placed under house arrest by General Santa Anna when his troops arrived to take the Alamo; after his victory, Santa Anna then made Ruíz identify the dead—including David Crockett, James Bowie, and William Travis—and dispose of their bodies. Joseph Antonio Menchaca (1800-1879) served under Seguín at the Battle of San Jacinto and returned to San Antonio after the revolution, where he served several terms as an alderman. Menchaca published his memoirs—50 years after Navarro's essays—in weekly installments in the *Passing Show* in San Antonio between June 22 and July 27, 1907; see "Memoirs by Antonio Menchaca, Yanaguana Society, San Antonio, 1937," available at: <http://www.tamu.edu/faculty/ccbn/dewitt/menchacamem.htm> and Timothy Matovina and Jesús F. de la Teja, eds., *Recollections of a Tejano Life: Antonio Menchaca in Texas History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013).

<sup>62</sup> In the National Historic Landmark theme study *American Latinos and the Making of the United States*, Ramón A. Gutiérrez writes in Chapter Four: "American history textbooks still largely narrate the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a series of pivotal wars, from the Texas Revolution (1836), to the U.S.-Mexico War (1846), to the Spanish American War (1898). When American history is told and taught this way, Latinos all but disappear. Mexican Texans and Anglos united during the Texas Revolution against a Mexico they deemed tyrannical. When we as modern Americans are urged to 'Remember the Alamo,' however, it is a call to remembrance not of this unity, but of the butchery Mexico unleashed to crush Texan self-rule. The popular names we still use to refer to America's expansionistic wars intentionally erase many of the major actors, certainly all of the vanquished, particularly those who became subjects and second-class citizens of the U.S. by virtue of their race and subjugation. Mexicans, Tejanos, and Comanches are often missing from the imperial narratives of the Texas Revolution." Gutiérrez, "The Latino Crucible: Its Origins in 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Wars, Revolutions, and Empire," 41.

<sup>63</sup> Much of the *Ledger* article's narrative seemed to be based upon William Kennedy's *Texas: The Rise, Progress, and Prospects of the Republic of Texas*, published in London in 1841.

<sup>64</sup> McDonald and Matovina, 31, n11 and 12; and 80, n10. Editors McDonald and Matovina refer to the *Ledger* article's tone as "arrogant," and specifically cite pages 266-277 of Kennedy's book as its source. In 1841—the same year as Kennedy's publication—Navarro provided a written account of events at the request of Texas President Mirabeau B. Lamar, as Lamar gathered information to prepare a history of Texas, but this was never completed for publication. Navarro's unpublished contributions may be found in Gulick and Elliott, eds., *Papers of Lamar*, vol. 3, 525-527 and 597-98.



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Titled "Historical Commentaries of San Antonio de Bexar by an Eyewitness," the essay began as a letter addressed "to the Editor of the *San Antonio Ledger*":

Respectable Sir:

In the issue of September 15 last, I read some historical recollections concerning the foundation and early history of San Antonio de Béxar. Since I was an eyewitness of all the salient events that were described, I cannot resist the temptation to correct some substantial errors contained in that narrative.... An accurate chronicle of those events has long been needed, for it would present to posterity the customs, character, abilities and moral qualities of the men of that epoch.

In 1813, the author of this letter was nearly eighteen years old; he lived in San Antonio and still retains fresh memories of that time. This circumstance, and his passion for his beloved San Antonio's history (which should be narrated with due respect for the truth) has produced the present declaration.

You will not discover vainglory, nor the inordinate desire for excellence of style, but rather a concise narrative of bloody and revolutionary times.<sup>65</sup>

Navarro's writings detailed key events of Mexico's decades-long struggle to end 300 years of colonial rule. The struggle began in the wake of Napoleon's invasion and occupation of Spain in 1808. In Mexico, viceroy José de Iturrigaray vowed to keep Mexico under Spain's rule until the Spanish monarchy could be restored. Tensions grew, however, as two factions developed in Mexico: Liberals wanted a reformed government like that in France and the United States, while conservatives wanted Mexico to remain as it had throughout the colonial era. The first stirrings of revolution occurred in central Mexico on September 16, 1810, when Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, a priest from the town of Dolores, issued a historic proclamation calling for the nation's oppressed people to revolt against its Spanish rulers. In fewer than two weeks, thousands of insurgents amassed, killed hundreds of Spaniards, and nearly captured Mexico City. In January 1811, however, Hidalgo's insurgent army was defeated. Hidalgo was executed, and another priest, José Maria Morelos, assumed control of the revolutionary movement until 1815 when he, too, was captured and executed. By then, the struggle for independence, kept alive by isolated guerrilla bands, had spread to Texas and would drag on for another six years.<sup>66</sup>

In northern Mexico's remote capital of San Antonio de Béxar, the teenaged Navarro watched events unfold. Throughout his essay, Navarro describes important events in Texas with great detail and connects them to later events of the Texas Revolution and to places that would be familiar to his San Antonio readers of 1853. He writes, for example, of the republican army, in the spring of 1813, marching "to a beating drum from the Alamo to the main plaza of San Antonio" and describes how the army "crossed the river by means of a miserable bridge, replaced today by the excellent and beautiful one at Commerce Street." He tells how José Bernardo Gutiérrez de Lara, leader of the Republican Army of the North, "took possession of the Casas Reales, where the beautiful store of the Vances now stands."<sup>67</sup>

Navarro filled his historical essay with details that located often gruesome events of the Mexican Revolution within the spaces and places that his contemporary readers would recognize. What he had known as a place of execution, for example, was by 1853 a fine hotel:

<sup>65</sup> McDonald and Matovina, 43.

<sup>66</sup> "Struggle for Mexican Independence" (<http://www.history.com/topics/mexico/struggle-for-mexican-independence>).

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 46-47.

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By an inexplicable coincidence, it appears that in San Antonio those same places where so many cruelties were committed have been reserved by Providence and destined, in happier times, to serve as lessons in devotion, justice, education, and recreation. For where the courthouse stands today, and in front of the balustrade of the hotel on the main plaza—one a sanctuary of law, the other a lodging place that provides the most delicious things that gastronomy has to offer—is where in those times daily executions took place, and often the moans of the dying were heard. The post office is the means by which our inner thoughts are communicated in writing, and through which knowledge and civility are diffused through the community; where the post office stands today, Arredondo devised a large prison for women known as *la quinta*. . . . Juana Leal de Tarín and Concepción Leal de Garza, who still live on their farms on the banks of the San Antonio River, were among those innocent and unfortunate prisoners of La Quinta. They endured their outrageous captivity with spirited courage...<sup>68</sup>

Navarro's descriptions of the participants of these events are alternately glowing and critical; of the junta's secretary, Mariano Rodriguez, still living at the time of publication in 1853, Navarro wrote: "At that time, he was an active and jolly youth. Today he is an antiquated septuagenarian who merely exists in San Antonio with a very limited recollection of the past and an utter indifference for the future."<sup>69</sup>

Neither did Navarro shy away from complex depictions of the Tejano players, whose actions were recounted as brave but also as misguided or cruel. "But we owe an impartial history to posterity, that such horrible deeds may be known to the future generations so that through their own good conduct, they may eradicate such horrible stains from our benevolent soil."<sup>70</sup> His historical commentary did not present the people struggling for independence from Spain as a monolithic whole, as did other narratives written by Anglo-Americans; rather, Navarro wrote: "Whoever is informed will understand that among the Mexicans of that time, with some exceptions, there was no clear political sentiment. They did not know the importance of the words 'independence and liberty.'"<sup>71</sup>

In this first installment of his history, Navarro carefully placed himself as a teenaged witness of the revolution, describing how he and "a number of curious youths observed from the tower of the Catholic parish church" the events of the Battle of Alazán on June 3, 1813. "We watched the clash of flashing weapons through our field glasses and listened to the horrifying thunder of the cannons."<sup>72</sup> Clearly, Navarro was aware that readers, whether Anglo or Tejano, might not accept his perspective of these events, writing, "Perhaps I shall be accused of exaggerating by giving [this] historical account."<sup>73</sup> He ended this first installment of his writings with a series of horrific executions on the Trinity River and the return to San Antonio of Spanish military commandant José Joaquín de Arredondo, summarizing:

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 55. José Joaquín Arredondo was military commandant of the Texas province during the first Texas revolts against Spanish rule. On the Koch map of 1873, the courthouse stands on the southeast side of the Main Plaza, near the corner of Soledad and Commerce streets. Of the executions to which Navarro refers, all 13 were Tejanos. More than 400 women were imprisoned at La Quinta; the two women mentioned were sisters, daughters of Don Joaquín Leal, who joined the insurgency along with his sons. Juana Tarín's husband, Don Vicente Tarín, resigned his post as commandant of the Alamo de Parras company to become a captain in the insurgent army. Her sister, Concepción Leal de Garza, was known to be outspoken in her support of the insurgency. These sisters seem to have been imprisoned for their connections to men involved in the resistance, rather than for any traitorous actions of their own.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 47; also 83, note 20. Mariano Rodríguez led the Mexican army in San Antonio during the Texas Revolution and fought in the battle of San Jacinto on April 21, 1836; he moved to Mexico but returned to San Antonio after 1848, hence Navarro's description of him as residing in town in 1853.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 51. Navarro and his friends observed the battle from the tower of the San Fernando Church.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 56.

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This is an imperfect but truthful history of the events of that period.... The noble citizens of Béxar sacrificed their lives and property, performing heroic deeds of valor in the year 1813. Yet they left to their descendants no other inheritance than the indifference and ingratitude of the Mexican Republic.

They never received any compensation or indemnity, not even the due respect and gratitude from their fellow citizens of Mexico. Our courage and heroism were cast into oblivion by the government of that ancient and renowned land. For that reason, I do not believe that anyone will be surprised by the germ of discontent that the people of Texas harbored. For this reason they adhere to a new order of things that is offered to us by the institutions of a great, powerful, and appreciative republic. Such is the beginning that brought about the Independence of Texas, which separated itself from that government forever.

Perhaps this subject can be continued at a later date.<sup>74</sup>

### The Essays of 1857–1858

Navarro did not write another installment of his historical commentaries until four years later, when he published the first of three essays in the *San Antonio Ledger*. The text was written as one whole, again in Spanish and translated to English, but published in three small episodes as a serial. At the time of its publication, Navarro was dividing his time between his San Antonio home on Laredo Street—today's Casa Navarro State Historic Site—and his rural residence on the Atascosa Ranch.

The first essay, printed on December 12, 1857, was written in response to Henderson Yoakum's popular, two-volume *History of Texas*,<sup>75</sup> which Navarro asserted was "plagued by a number of inexactitudes."<sup>76</sup> In the introduction to his essay, Navarro clearly stated that his goal was to counter Yoakum and to inform readers of the important roles that Tejanos played in the pivotal events that secured freedom from Mexico for all Texans, whether Tejanos or Anglos. Navarro believed that Americans were using "base, aggressive pretexts" to remove Tejanos from the story of Texas independence—first from Spain and then from Mexico. He had watched the Tejano people struggle for liberty no less than the Anglos, and he wanted them to have their due in the historical narrative.

I write this booklet as an inveterate devotee to historical materials, without literary pretensions, against all mercenary purposes, and feeling myself free and above those who do such for profit. The events I narrate were fixed in my retina at the time they occurred, and I have no need to resort to periphrases or allegories, as in mythological accounts.... These motives and the urging of some of my friends, who have desired to know about the most important contemporaneous events that happened in our city, have persuaded me to write this brief chronicle.

I do not write for the heartless nor for the egoists—to whom the glories and misfortunes of men of another origin and language matter little or not at all. I write for the humanitarian and cultured who understand how to respect and empathize with the tribulations of a valiant people who have struggled, in the midst of their own ignorance,

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 58-59.

<sup>75</sup> Henderson King Yoakum, *History of Texas from Its First Settlement in 1685 to Its Annexation to the United States in 1846* (New York: Redfield, 1856). Like Navarro, a Texas county was posthumously named in honor of Yoakum. An attorney and friend of Sam Houston, Yoakum was appointed in 1849 as director of the state penitentiary at Huntsville, Texas.

<sup>76</sup> McDonald and Matovina, 24 and 62.

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guided only by an instinct for their liberty, against enemies so superior that they may be placed alongside the most free and fortunate nations of all mankind—such as the nation with the flag of stars. I write in order to inform our Americans, however indignant some of them among us may be, who with base, aggressive pretexts want to uproot from this classic land its legitimate people who are the descendants of those who fifty years ago spilled their blood searching for the liberty of which we now vaingloriously boast.<sup>77</sup>

This first part of Navarro's series of essays began in 1808 with the arrival in San Antonio of Octaviano d'Alvimar, an agent provocateur sent by Napoleon as the proclaimed viceroy of Mexico. Although d'Alvimar was swiftly imprisoned by the Spanish who still ruled Mexico, "the troops of Napoleon triumphed everywhere and thousands of Spaniards were swearing obedience to the French emperor." As in 1853, here again Navarro wrote of Father Hidalgo of Dolores, who cried the first "shout for independence," inspiring the cataclysmic events of "plunder and slaughter" that saw Mexico grasp for its freedom from Spain. "But how powerful are the instincts of a people who fight for a just cause!" he wrote. "The Mexicans...triumphed everywhere by the end of 1810."

This first installment ended with Navarro's description of the wealth of San Antonio de Béxar, where a garrison of two thousand Spanish soldiers guarded Texas against encroachments by the United States. "Each soldier, one could say, was a citizen-capitalist—a distinguished calling to which the Viceroy of Mexico was passionately devoted. Is it surprising that at this time San Antonio was at the height of its prosperity? Hundreds of thousands in gold and silver coin came into the city every two months for the diligent maintenance of the troops. It was a common sight to see a soldier expend a hundred pesos on a meal—and with the same nonchalance with which today we invite a friend to a glass of beer."<sup>78</sup>

The second installment of the historical commentaries was published one week later, on December 19, 1857. Picking up with the description of a prosperous San Antonio under Spanish rule, Navarro told of the founding families of the city, "its legitimate original masters...[who] were considered nobility from the time their fathers sailed from the Canary Islands to settle in the Province of Texas" in 1730. Members of these founding families, whom Navarro described as "belligerent nobles," were buoyed by reports of Hidalgo's insurrection in Mexico and joined the insurrection. They organized troops in armed barracks at La Villita, to the east of San Antonio's main plaza, to fight against the "despotic actions" of the Spanish governors.

Led by Juan Bautista de la Casas, the rebel militia of fifteen hundred rose at dawn on January 22, 1811, and captured Governor Manuel María de Salcedo and his officials at their headquarters. "This was the day in which they no longer attempted to restrain the trembling, guttural voice that pervades the long and servile life, and they were able to speak out loudly to those who had been the absolute masters of the Mexicans."

Navarro ended this second installment with the counter-revolution against Casas on March 3, 1811, led by the priest Juan Manuel Zambrano, a native Bexareño who "possessed a special talent for total disorder." As in his earlier essay, Navarro again illustrated that the Mexican people were not a monolithic whole to be dismissed or discounted by the dominant narratives of Anglo historians; rather, they were humans with all their frailties, loyalties, and complexities, acting to achieve their own interests with often mixed results, concluding:

It is not my intention to rebuke the conduct of those who took part in this counter-revolution...but rather to deplore and pity the errant reasoning of those who, imbued with the false honor of being faithful to the most detestable tyrant of Europe, made an ostentatious show of plunging the fratricidal dagger into the heart of their Mexican

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 62-63.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 66.

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brothers. Thus they hammered the rivets of their own chains, condemning themselves to trudge sorrowfully behind the plodding Spanish ox to earn their daily bread...and the inhabitants of San Antonio returned to the status of vassals of the king of Spain.<sup>79</sup>

The third and final installment of Navarro's commentaries in the *San Antonio Ledger* were not published until three weeks later, on January 2, 1858. Here, he described the events in which Gutiérrez, formerly a colonel in Hidalgo's Mexican army, led American volunteers in campaigns for Mexican independence in 1812 and 1813. "[T]he tottering Spanish rulers would very soon be broken apart by the moral strength of republican institutions."<sup>80</sup> Men from prominent Tejano families joined Gutiérrez to fight against Arredondo and his royalist army at the Battle of Medina, but they were defeated, and the struggle continued for years until "Mexican independence, germinated in the blood of these martyrs, was finally declared in September 1821."

Navarro concluded his history of Tejanos' struggle for freedom by mentioning the recent murders of two of his contemporaries and fellow patriots by "people who boast of their [own] justice and excellence." These deaths stirred Navarro to remind Anglos that their Tejano neighbors had fought for the very peace and plenty that all Americans now enjoyed in Texas. He urged his American readers to recognize the valor with which Tejanos had fought for their basic rights and freedoms before the earliest days of the Texas republic:

May Divine Providence use these historical commentaries to stir generous hearts to treat with more respect this race of men who, as the legitimate proprietors of this land, lost it together with their lives and their hopes, to follow in the footsteps of those very ones who now enjoy the land in the midst of peace and plenty.<sup>81</sup>

Navarro's interest in defending the historical legacy of Tejanos is strongly reflective of his earlier work as a statesman who not only signed the Texas Declaration of Independence but also participated in the formation of the Democratic Party of Bexar County and led opposition to the anti-immigrant, anti-Catholic Know-Nothing Party. Navarro defended Tejanos' rights to land claims, full citizenship, and the right to vote in Texas. In writing the first Tejano history of Texas, Navarro continued to advocate for his people as he emphasized their important contributions to the development of San Antonio and to the state of Texas as a whole. Navarro clearly identified Tejanos as people who sacrificed their lives for their homelands and were worthy of respect from Anglo-American newcomers, whose achievements, he argued, were built upon a foundation laid by their Tejano forebears.

In June 1869, fewer than two years before Navarro's death, Narciso Leal and other friends of Navarro approached the elder statesman with the proposal to gather together his historical writings of 1853 and 1857-1858 for publication in their original Spanish. In a letter, Leal asked Navarro to "set aside your scrupulous modesty and favor our idea of publishing your historical commentaries, for we believe firmly they will be received with enthusiasm by all Mexican citizens of Texas, especially the descendants of San Antonio."<sup>82</sup> The single volume, *Apuntes históricos interesantes de San Antonio de Béxar* ("Commentaries of Historical Interest on San Antonio de Béxar"), featured Leal's letter of inquiry to Navarro, as well as Navarro's reply, in which he stated that his only purpose in writing these essays "was to eliminate some errors that I had seen published in the American press concerning several episodes occurring in Texas back in the years 1811 and 1813. These years were most fertile in politics and impassioned events concerning Mexican independence, when for the first time the scions of San Antonio de Bexar manifested their patriotism and performed prodigies of bravery that

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 67-71.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 33.

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were almost unbelievable.”<sup>83</sup> These letters were followed by an introductory biographical essay by Leal, describing Navarro as one of “few men...who have not only desired to be a patriot but have known how to be one,” a person of “scant education” but possessing “irrepressible dignity.”<sup>84</sup> The 1853 and 1857-1858 essays were then included in full, as Navarro had written them in Spanish.

With these historical essays and in other letters and speeches, Navarro offered a message of Tejano pride and empowerment to both Tejano and Anglo-American audiences. Navarro wrote to demonstrate that the Tejanos who had sacrificed their lives for freedom in the decades before the Texas republic were not “the passive pawns of despots” but “fellow revolutionaries.”<sup>85</sup> Proud of his Tejano roots and a patriotic American, Navarro summarized the purpose of his life’s work in a letter addressed “To the Mexican Citizens of San Antonio,” published in the Spanish-language newspaper *El Bejareño* on July 21, 1855:

The American flag covers us, to it we belong, and for it we ought to sacrifice our lives if it is necessary; its brilliant constellations give us plenty of light with which to see and defend our rights. Why should we appear to be strangers in our own land where we were born? Why should we not be pure Americans in order to earn the benefits of her institutions?—then they will not frighten us with that [notion] that we are of another origin; then our American convictions will blot out the apathetic images and will elevate us to think, feel, and participate in all the transactions of our adopted country.<sup>86</sup>

### Significance of Casa Navarro and Comparable Properties

Casa Navarro is significant as the primary urban residence of José Antonio Navarro from around the time of its purchase until the end of his life. Most importantly, Navarro lived here while writing and publishing his historical essays in the 1850s, the period considered “the height of his fame and influence.”<sup>87</sup> José Antonio Navarro died in his bedroom in the adobe and limestone house on January 14, 1871. Casa Navarro is the only extant resource directly associated with José Antonio Navarro; no other properties survive.

Although exact dates of construction for the original two rooms of the main house are not known, it is thought to be around 1840. Navarro’s biographer David McDonald—who served as the superintendent of Casa Navarro for decades—believes that the two-story Mercantile Building was built after the original two-room Navarro House, but before subsequent additions transformed the house into the L-shaped building we see today. According to McDonald, the Mercantile Building most likely was constructed before October 1856, when George W. Kendall, Navarro’s companion during the ill-fated Santa Fe Expedition, visited Navarro at his San Antonio home on Laredo Street and described the enlarged house as “new and tidy.”<sup>88</sup> Navarro and his sons may have used the first floor of the Mercantile Building for their own commercial endeavors before renting that space to a tenant for a general store. Navarro’s son, José Angel Navarro III, who graduated with a law degree from Harvard University in 1850, is believed to have practiced law from the office on the second floor.

None of the other houses that Navarro lived in or owned—whether his two ranches or his other investment properties in urban San Antonio—exist today, making true comparables difficult, if not impossible, to find.

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>85</sup> Crisp, 159.

<sup>86</sup> José Antonio Navarro, “Segunda Junta Democratica, De los Ciudadanos Mejico-Tejanos del Condado de Bejar, “*El Bejareño*, July 21, 1855; quoted in Crisp, 159.

<sup>87</sup> Crisp, 148; also McDonald, 8.

<sup>88</sup> McDonald, 250, and 327 n13. The description was contained in a letter of October 1856.



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Buildings or sites associated with other leaders of this period, such as the Veramendi House in San Antonio, also have been demolished.

### Navarro's Birthplace on Real (Flores) Street

The exact birthplace of José Antonio Navarro on February 27, 1795, is not known, but it likely was either the home of his father, Ángel Navarro, purchased in 1780; or the home of his maternal grandparents, Juan Manuel Ruíz and Manuela de la Peña. The two houses were located across from each other on Real Street (present day Flores Street) in the Barrio del Norte of San Antonio de Béxar.<sup>89</sup> According to Navarro biographer McDonald, the two families lived separately in the early 1800s, but the Ruíz house eventually would become the main residence of the Navarro family. The Ruíz-Navarro house was a large dwelling of limestone—quite substantial in contrast to smaller adobe or jacal structures nearby—located in a prominent area of San Antonio near the presidio and the San Fernando Church; this location at the corner of Flores and Presidio streets later came to be known as “Navarro Corner.”<sup>90</sup> Navarro lived in the Ruíz-Navarro house with his family for more than 25 years, but the tragic deaths of his sister, María Joséfa, and her husband, Governor Juan Martín de Veramendi, in a cholera epidemic inspired Navarro to close this chapter of his life. On September 29, 1833, three days after learning of their deaths, Navarro sold his interest in the family home to his brother José Luciano Navarro, for 100 pesos cash; their other siblings had already sold their claims to the large house to José Luciano in 1827.<sup>91</sup>

When preparing his will shortly before his death, Navarro had advised his sons to hold on to the old Navarro house that his father had purchased on Flores and Commerce streets, predicting that it would double in value in the following eight to ten years; his sons, however, sold the house to its tenant, Fritz Schreiner, shortly after their father's death in 1871.<sup>92</sup> None of these dwellings survive today, and so they cannot serve to tell the story of Navarro's life; further, a birthplace typically is not eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places or designated as a National Historic Landmark, unless the birthplace is also associated with the productive life of a significant person, or if it is the only extant site associated with a person.

### Atascosa Ranch

In 1830, Navarro claimed four leagues of land on the Atascosa River that included Agua Negra Creek, but it would be more than a year until he received clear title and a survey of the property.<sup>93</sup> On October 4, 1831, the survey documented that Navarro owned four arable *labores de temporal*, each one 177 acres, with the remainder of his claim classified as “pasture”; in total the Atascosa Ranch property consisted of 708 arable acres for farming and 17,004 acres of pasture for grazing cattle. On October 6, 1831, Navarro took title to this property, paying 125.25 pesos—115.25 for the pasture, and 10 for the farmland.<sup>94</sup> The east side of the ranch property bordered the Gachupin Trail, which at that time was a part of the southern route to Presidio Rio Grande. McDonald describes the ranch as a rectangle 5.81 miles in length and 4.6 miles in width, straddling the Atascosa River, with a “panhandle” of one square mile projecting on the north side to include water from Agua Negra Creek. Contemporary roads today correspond to the boundaries of this ranch, with Texas Highway 476

<sup>89</sup> McDonald, 14-15, 288 n9. Real Street was also known as Calle de las Flores as early as 1797, after which it became generally known as Flores Street. This street, as shown on Koch's 1873 *Bird's Eye View of the City of San Antonio*, ran north to south and bisected or separated the main plaza on the east from the military plaza on the west.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 36. Another child who grew up on Real/Flores Street with José Antonio Navarro, Margarita de la Garza, later became Navarro's wife. She described her family's home, situated on a narrow strip of land to the north of the Ruíz-Navarro house, as having been constructed of *palos y cascara*, or “posts and tree bark.”

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 116, 306 n68; and Bexar County Deed Record, Volume F-1, 15-18.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 267-268, 329n44; Bexar County Courthouse Deed Record, Volume 3, 36.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 96-97; Bexar County Courthouse, Deed Record, Volume C-1, 10-12.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 105, 303n43; Bexar County Courthouse, Deed Record, Volume C-1, 7-8, 14, 18.

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on the north border, and Texas Highway 2146 just inside and parallel to the eastern boundary. The northeast corner of the ranch is adjacent to the present-day town of Poteet, Texas.

Navarro prospered despite the chaos of the Texas Revolution. Tax rolls in 1837 indicate that he owned 234 head of cattle at his Atascosa and San Geronimo ranches; valued at \$1,200, Navarro's herd was larger than that of any other rancher in Béxar.<sup>95</sup> The tax records show that Navarro also owned five lots in the city of San Antonio, including the site now known as Casa Navarro. In the 1850s—the period during which Navarro wrote his *Apuntes*—he divided his time between the Atascosa Ranch and his city house on Laredo Street, the subject of this nomination. Records from the 1860s show that at the Atascosa ranch, Navarro owned 100 milk cows, 12 oxen, 200 swine, \$100 of farming equipment—and six slaves.<sup>96</sup> After the emancipation of slaves in Texas in 1865, many of Navarro's slaves remained at the Atascosa Ranch as sharecroppers.<sup>97</sup>

In the will that he began to prepare in February 1870, Navarro left his ranch lands in equal, undivided portions to each of his four sons, minus 606 acres near Agua Negra Creek for his only surviving daughter, Joséfa; this meant that each son received 4,823 acres of ranch lands, for which they had to negotiate among themselves for ownership.<sup>98</sup> His son Sixto Navarro, who obtained the lands on which the house and farm were located, sold that property in 1894; his brothers and sister sold off their inherited lands beginning in 1876. No Navarro descendants are known today to own any portion of the Atascosa Ranch property, and the Navarro house located on those lands has long since been demolished.<sup>99</sup>

### San Geronimo Ranch

In 1834 Navarro purchased two leagues of land, about seven miles north of the present-day town of Seguin, for \$250 from his wife's half-sister. This property, which included prime farmlands, was known as the San Geronimo Ranch, and it served as Navarro's primary country residence for his family from 1840 until the end of 1853, when he sold it for \$16,000.<sup>100</sup>

Between the completion of his house on the San Geronimo ranch in 1840 and his departure on the Santa Fe Expedition in 1841, Navarro resided most of the time at Casa Navarro in San Antonio. In 1848, having served as a legislator under three different national governments, Navarro left public life and for five years lived as a "gentleman rancher" at San Geronimo.<sup>101</sup> Perhaps in response to rising anti-Tejano sentiment in the region, Navarro sold the San Geronimo Ranch to Alexander Ewing on December 19, 1853.<sup>102</sup> A photograph in the collection of the Seguin Heritage Museum, reprinted in McDonald's biography of Navarro, shows the San Geronimo Ranch house in 1930. The one-story house appears to be L-shaped with a side-gabled roof partially clad in wood shingle and elsewhere in sheet metal, with deep porches supported by hewn wood posts; it also appears to have been in poor condition at that time. This house is not extant today, and therefore cannot represent the life and work of Navarro.

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 251-251.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 261.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 267.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 268-272.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 117-118, 156-158.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 233-234.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 241.



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Veramendi House

The adobe-walled compound of the wealthy merchant Fernando Veramendi, who came to San Antonio de Béxar from Spain in 1770, was constructed on Soledad Street, to the north of the main plaza, around 1780. The Veramendi House later was commonly called “the Veramendi Palace” because it was the official residence of Fernando Veramendi’s son Juan Martín de Veramendi, who rose to prominence in local politics and eventually became the governor of Coahuila y Texas in 1832. Seventeen years older than José Antonio Navarro, Juan Martín de Veramendi married Navarro’s sister María Joséfa in 1810. The two brothers-in-law became close friends and trusted confidants. Navarro referred to Veramendi as his “political brother,” and Veramendi gave Navarro a power of attorney to represent him before authorities up to and including the Pope.<sup>103</sup>

The Veramendi House was a typical Spanish Colonial house of the mid- to late-eighteenth century in its construction: a single story adobe and limestone dwelling, one room deep, with a flat roof supported by protruding cypress *vigas* (beams). Larger than any of its neighbors and L-shaped in plan, it included a reception room, a dining room, and several bedrooms. The house had openings for windows and doors in its thick walls facing the street, and the windows were covered with bars or grilles. Continuous adobe walls, which extended beyond the building’s façade, defined the property’s borders and created a private courtyard. The courtyard was accessible to carts or horses on Soledad Street by a pair of immense, multi-paneled wood doors, which since 1935 have been displayed in the Alamo. Juan Martín de Veramendi first expanded the property when he became the *alcalde* of San Antonio in 1824. He added more rooms for his family and important visitors, as well as a kitchen, stables, and servants’ quarters, all constructed to face the private courtyard.<sup>104</sup>

Following the deaths of Veramendi, his wife, and children in a cholera epidemic in 1833, the house was left to Veramendi’s heirs and then was sold outside of the family. The large compound served as a hotel until the end of the nineteenth century, when it became the Veramendi Palace Saloon; later tenants included a used furniture store, a butcher’s shop, and a curio store.<sup>105</sup> The compound was completely demolished in 1909 to allow the widening of Soledad Street, and by March 1910 the site featured the new “modern office and factory” building of the San Antonio Printing Company.<sup>106</sup> The Texas Historical Commission placed a small marker, “Site of the Old Veramendi House,” inside the office building at 130 Soledad Street in 1965.

Although Navarro would have known the Veramendi House well, since it was the home of his sister and her husband, who was a dear friend and political ally, the compound was not directly connected to Navarro nor the activities or writings for which he is best known. More importantly, the Veramendi House is no longer extant.

**Conclusion**

Casa Navarro meets NHL Criterion 2 for its association with José Antonio Navarro and retains a high degree of historic integrity, providing visitors a sense of what life was like in nineteenth-century San Antonio and a richer understanding of Navarro’s role in the struggle for Tejano rights during this period. Due to the dedication of the members of the San Antonio Conservation Society, who fought to save Casa Navarro from the wrecking ball during the late 1950s and early 1960s, and years of dedicated stewardship by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and the Texas Historical Commission, Casa Navarro continues to keep alive the story of José Antonio Navarro.

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 18-19.

<sup>104</sup> Bartlett Cocke, “Veramendi Palace,” Historic American Buildings Survey, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, March 10, 1937. From Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress (HABS TX-3128).

<sup>105</sup> *San Antonio Light and Gazette*, July 18, 1906; November 14, 1909.

<sup>106</sup> *San Antonio Daily Express*, March 14, 1910.

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Today, Casa Navarro remains the sole extant site directly associated with the life and work of Tejano merchant, rancher, statesman, and historian José Antonio Navarro. Interpretive exhibits at the state historic site, which consists of three contributing buildings constructed or modified by Navarro during his ownership and residency, tell the story of Navarro's life from his birth in San Antonio de Béxar, through his years of service to three different national governments, to his death in the house in 1871. The buildings have been rehabilitated to reflect the years in which Navarro lived in this city house and published his historical writings, which countered dominant Anglo narratives disparaging the Mexican heritage of Texas and ignoring the contributions of Tejano people. From this house, and in his public speeches and published essays, Navarro worked tirelessly as "the strongest champion of the rights of [his] people."<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Narciso Leal *et al*, "Breve rasgo biográfico sobre el autor de estos apuntes," in Navarro, *Apuntes*, 4; quoted in McDonald and Matovina, eds., *Defending Mexican Valor in Texas*, 16.

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

☐ Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested

☒ Previously Listed in the National Register: NR# 72001353; Listed March 24, 1972

☐ Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register

☐ Designated a National Historic Landmark

☒ Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: # TEX-317 (Navarro, José Antonio, Store)

# TEX-3148 (Navarro, José Antonio, House)

Primary Location of Additional Data:

☒ State Historic Preservation Office: Texas Historical Commission, Austin

☐ Other State Agency

☐ Federal Agency

☐ Local Government

☐ University

☒ Other (Specify Repository): San Antonio Conservation Society, San Antonio

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**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA****Acreage of Property:** Approximately 1 acre**Latitude/Longitude:** 29.423216, -98.497396**Verbal Boundary Description:** NCB (New City Block) 13418, Lot 4

**Boundary Justification:** The boundary includes the entire property now known as Casa Navarro, which is owned and operated by the Texas Historical Commission. The property is the original 1.2 acres purchased by Navarro in 1832, except for a six-foot wide portion, running the length of the southern border and parallel to Nueva Street, which was taken for street widening in the 1960s.



Google earth

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS PROGRAM

Casa Navarro, San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas March 10, 2016

UTM coordinate: Zone 14 Easting 548797 Northing 3254932



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Casa Navarro (left) and Mercantile/Office Building (right) looking east/northeast.  
Rachel Leibowitz photographer, April 2013



View of Casa Navarro across Nueva Street looking north/northeast.  
Mercantile/Office on left, house in center, kitchen on right.  
Rachel Leibowitz photographer, April 2013



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Navarro House on Laredo Street looking east/southeast.  
Rachel Leibowitz photographer, April 2013



Navarro House showing bedroom addition from courtyard, looking west/southwest.  
Rachel Leibowitz photographer, April 2013

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Navarro House, south elevation as seen from Mercantile/Office Building, looking north.  
Rachel Leibowitz photographer, April 2013



Navarro House interior showing southern room of original two-room dwelling.  
Now interpreted as a parlor with fireplace on north wall.  
Rachel Leibowitz photographer, April 2013



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Navarro House showing the northern room of the original two-room dwelling.  
Rachel Leibowitz photographer, April 2013



Mercantile/Office Building looking southeast.  
Rachel Leibowitz photographer, April 2013

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Northeast corner of Mercantile/Office Building (center) as seen from courtyard, looking west/southwest.  
Rachel Leibowitz photographer, April 2013



Mercantile/Office Building interior, first floor north wall.  
Rachel Leibowitz photographer, April 2013



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Kitchen, west façade seen from courtyard.  
Rachel Leibowitz photographer, April 2013



Kitchen, east façade from courtyard with Navarro House in background.  
Rachel Leibowitz photographer, April 2013

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Kitchen Building interior with fireplace on what was the north exterior wall.  
Rachel Leibowitz photographer, April 2013



The Well (contributing structure) outside door of north side of kitchen.  
Maintenance workshop and public restrooms on background.  
Rachel Leibowitz photographer, April 2013





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**FIGURES**

Figure Number	Description and Source
1	Site plan of Casa Navarro State Historic Site, 2013. Map courtesy of the Texas Historical Commission.
2	Site plan of Casa Navarro State Historic Site, April 1977. Map prepared by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Historic Sites and Restoration Branch. Files of Texas Historical Commission.
3	Detail of Augustus Koch map, <i>Bird's Eye View of the City of San Antonio Bexar County Texas</i> , 1873, showing the Navarro House. Lithograph. Published by J.J. Stoner, Madison, Wis. Center for American History, the University of Texas at Austin.
4	Drawing of the "Navarro Store," South Laredo and West Nueva streets, San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas. Historic American Buildings Survey, 1936. (HABS TEX, 15-SANT, 14-), 1936. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division. (Sheet 1 of 3).
5	Drawing of the "Navarro Store," South Laredo and West Nueva streets, San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas. Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS TEX, 15-SANT, 14-), 1936. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division. (Sheet 2 of 3).
6	Perspective of the Casa Navarro site, looking northeast, drawn by Brooks Martin, AIA, ca. 1960.
7	Section drawing of the cistern, a contributing structure. Files of Texas Historical Commission.
8	Photograph of the Navarro Store with partial view of the Navarro House, ca. 1930-1933, indicates that standing seam metal had been placed over the historic, wood shingle roofs. Photographer unknown. Image courtesy of Texas Historical Commission.
9	1936 photograph showing northwest elevation (west front and north side) of the Jose Antonio Navarro Store, 232 South Laredo Street, San Antonio. Arthur W. Stewart, photographer, April 6, 1936. Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS TEX, 15-SANT, 14-1). Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.
10	1936 photograph showing southeast elevation (south side and east rear) of the Jose Antonio Navarro Store, 232 South Laredo Street, San Antonio. Arthur W. Stewart, photographer, April 6, 1936. Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS TEX, 15-SANT, 14-1). Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.
11	1961 photograph showing west elevation of the Jose Antonio Navarro Store, 232 South Laredo Street, San Antonio, with Navarro House on left. Jack Boucher, photographer, October 1961. Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS TEX, 15-SANT, 14-3). Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.
12	1961 photograph showing front (west) elevation of the Navarro House, 228 South Laredo Street, San Antonio. Jack Boucher, photographer, October 1961. Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS TEX, 15-SANT, 23-1). Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.
13	Oblique view of the Navarro House and Store, looking southeast from across Laredo Street, ca. 1960. Courtesy of the Texas Historical Commission.

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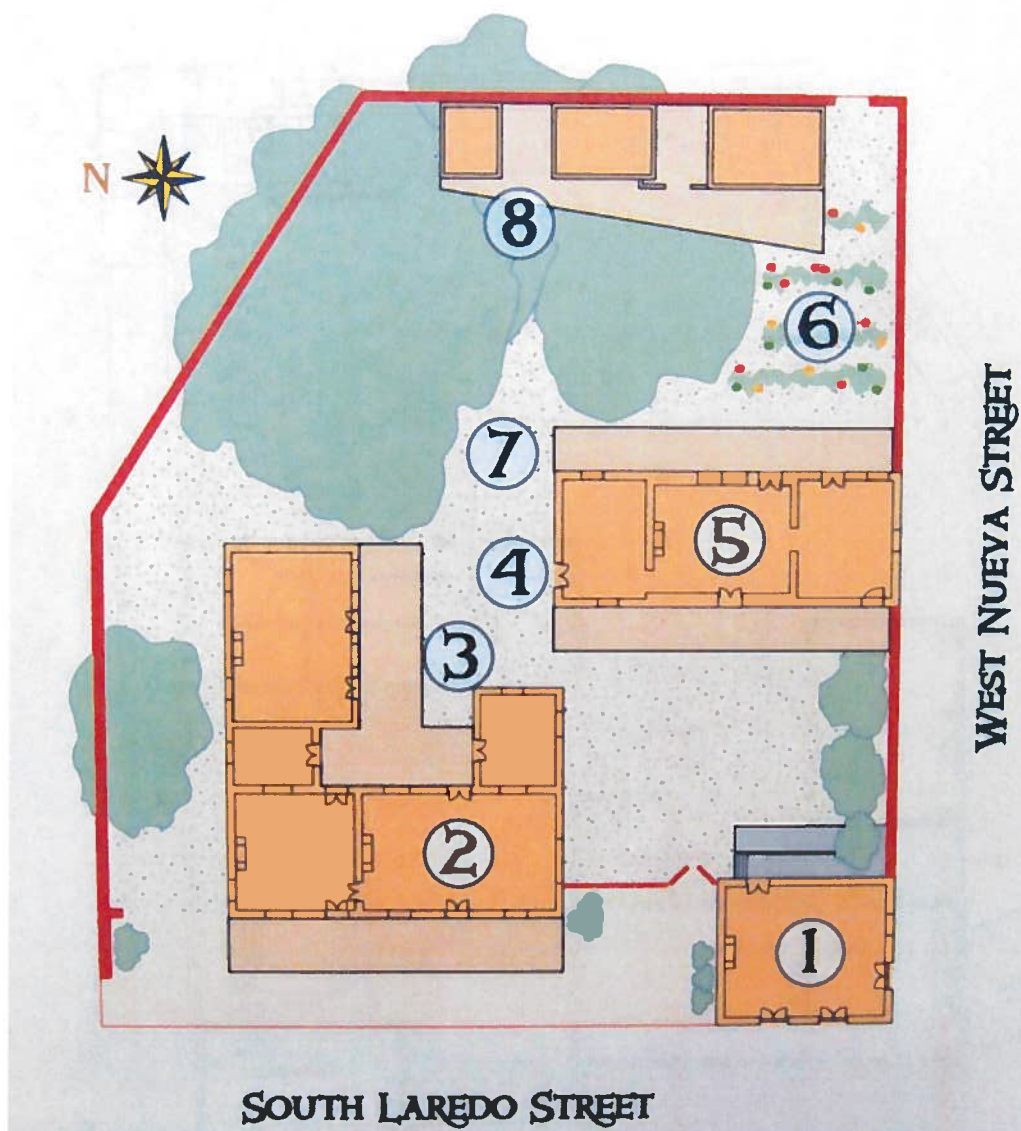
14	Courtyard view of the Navarro House looking northwest and showing well (foreground) and cistern, ca. 1962. Both are contributing structures. Courtesy of Texas Historical Commission.
15	Interior view of the Navarro store and office, looking up through charred second floor joists, ca. 1962. Brooks Martin wrote in his 1967 "Notes" that sometime after 1936 a fire destroyed the floor joists and canvas ceiling. Courtesy of Texas Historical Commission.
16	Interior view of the northeastern room of the Navarro House, ca. 1962. This room is thought to have been the bedroom of José Antonio Navarro. Courtesy of Texas Historical Commission.
17	Formal photograph of Jose Antonio Navarro, ca. 1860. Courtesy Texas Historical Commission.

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**Figure 1.** Plan, Casa Navarro State Historic Site, 2013

1. Navarro Office and Store (Mercantile Building)
2. Casa Navarro (Navarro House, or Main House)
3. Cistern
4. Well
5. Kitchen
6. Garden
7. Courtyard
8. Public restrooms and maintenance building (constructed in 2011; non-contributing)

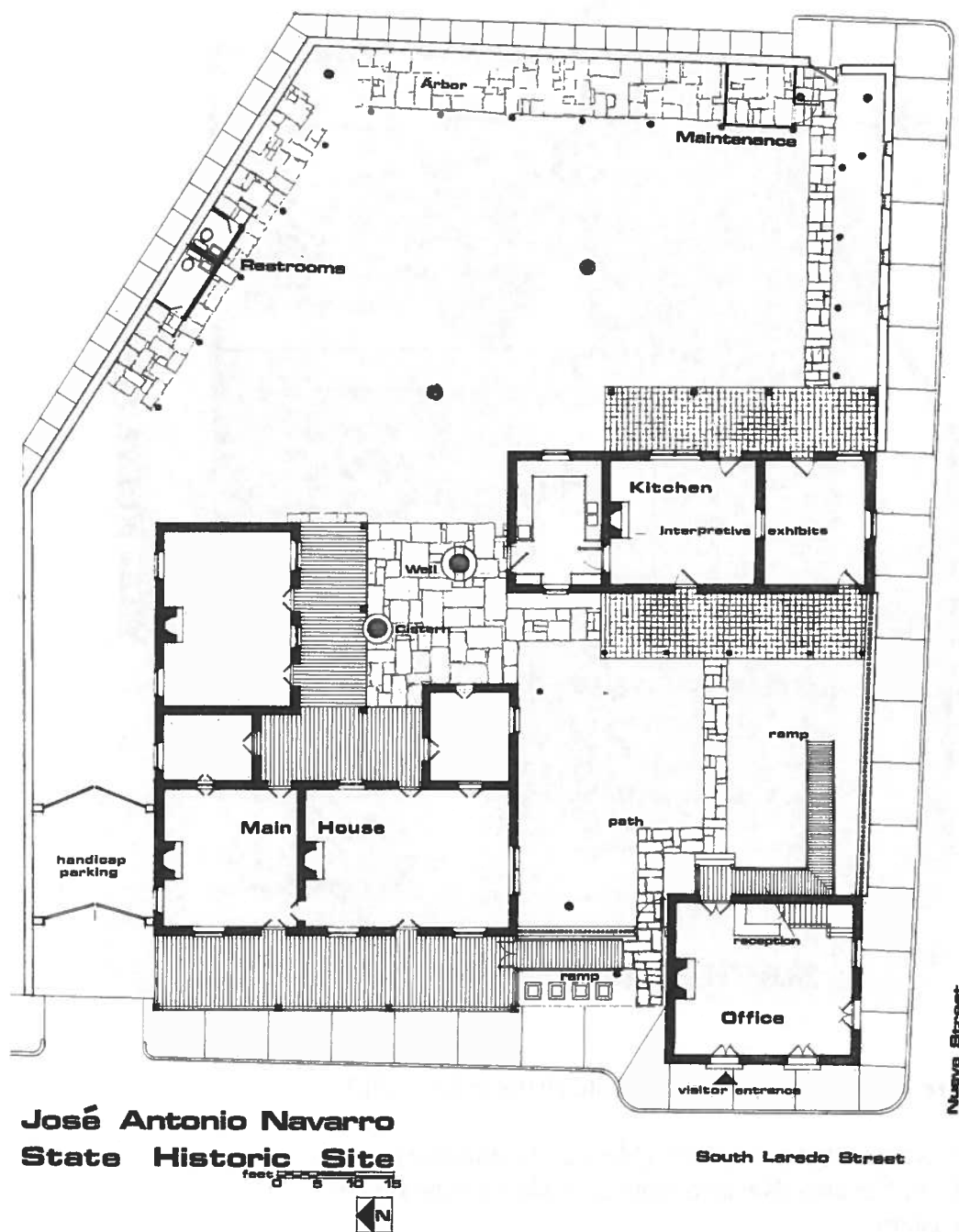
Site plan courtesy of the Texas Historical Commission, Austin.

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**Figure 2.** Casa Navarro, site plan prepared by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Historic Sites and Restoration Branch, April 1977. Note the catering kitchen in the north room of the Kitchen building, added by Brooks Martin for the San Antonio Conservation Society in the 1960s. This has been removed to allow space for more interpretive exhibits. The restroom and maintenance buildings and the arbor were demolished in 2011, and new walking paths added, as illustrated in the plan in Figure 1.

Files of the Texas Historical Commission, Austin.

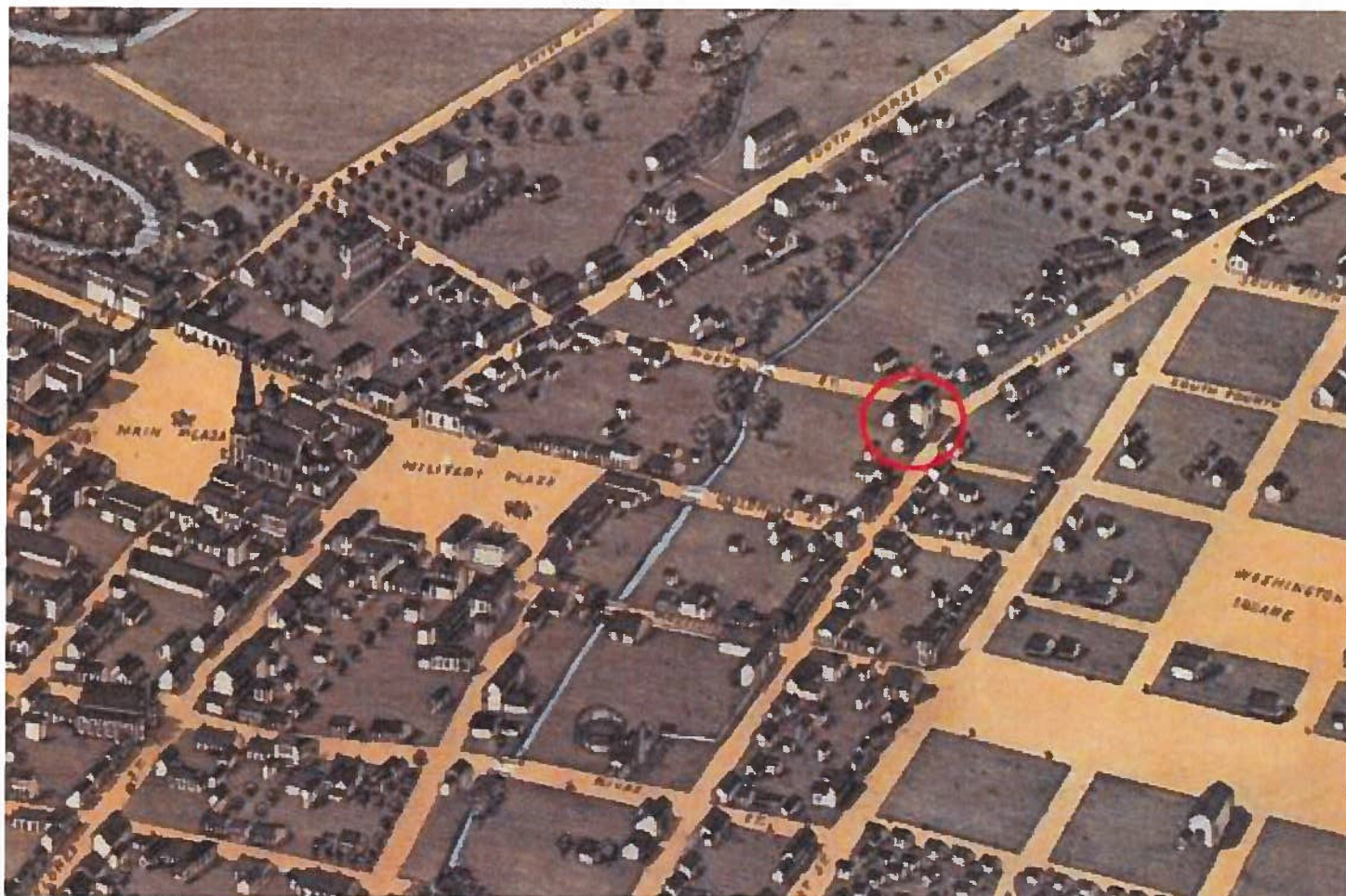


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**Figure 3.** Detail of Augustus Koch map, *Bird's Eye View of the City of San Antonio Bexar County Texas*, 1873. Lithograph. Published by J.J. Stoner, Madison, Wis. Center for American History, the University of Texas at Austin.

Casa Navarro is circled; the two-story office/commercial building stands at the corner of Laredo (here written as "Lareda") and Nueva streets. The Navarro House is immediately adjacent to the office, facing Laredo Street, while the kitchen building stands behind the office.

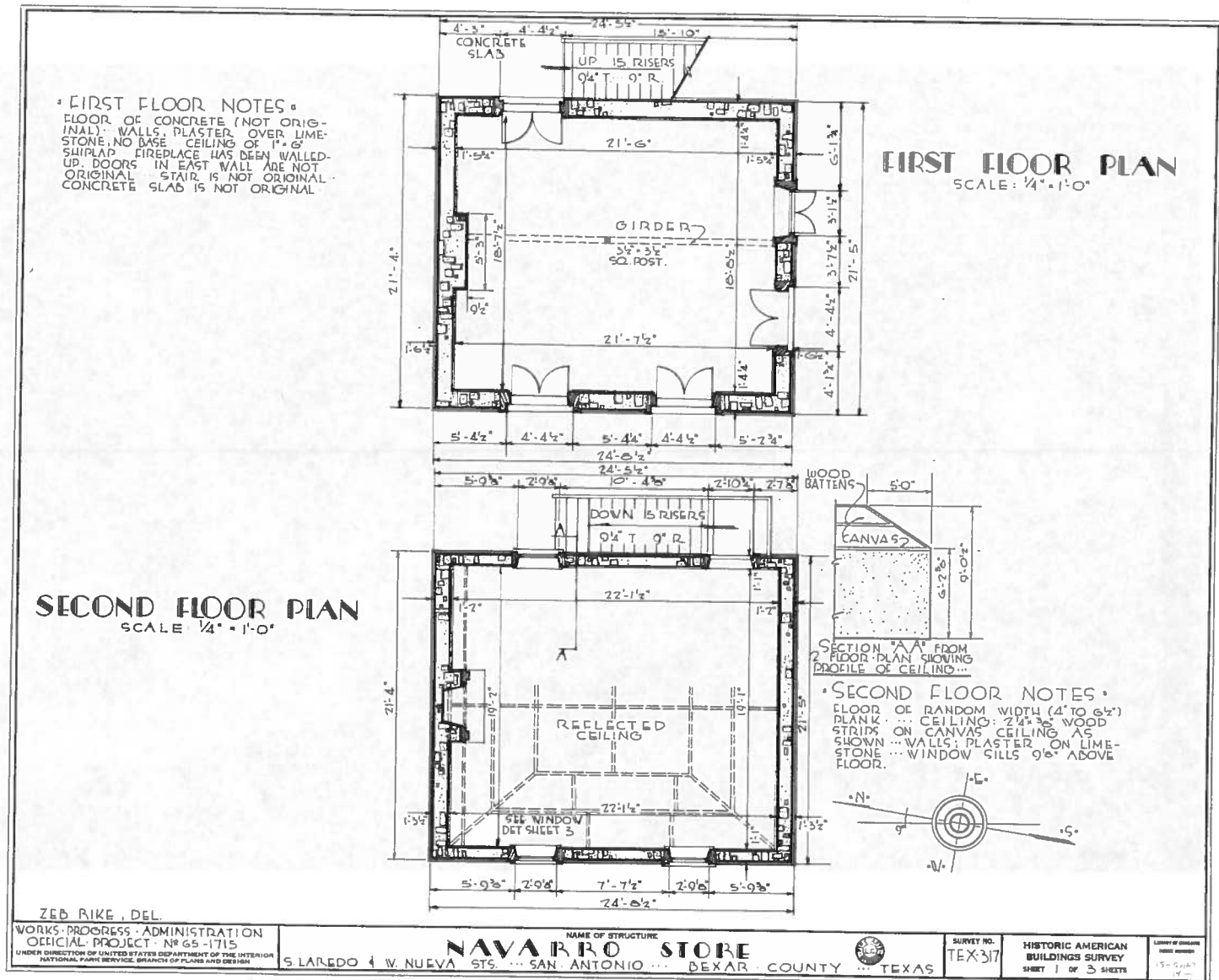


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**Figure 4.** "Jose Antonio Navarro Store, 232 South Laredo Street, San Antonio, Bexar County, TX." Drawn in 1936.

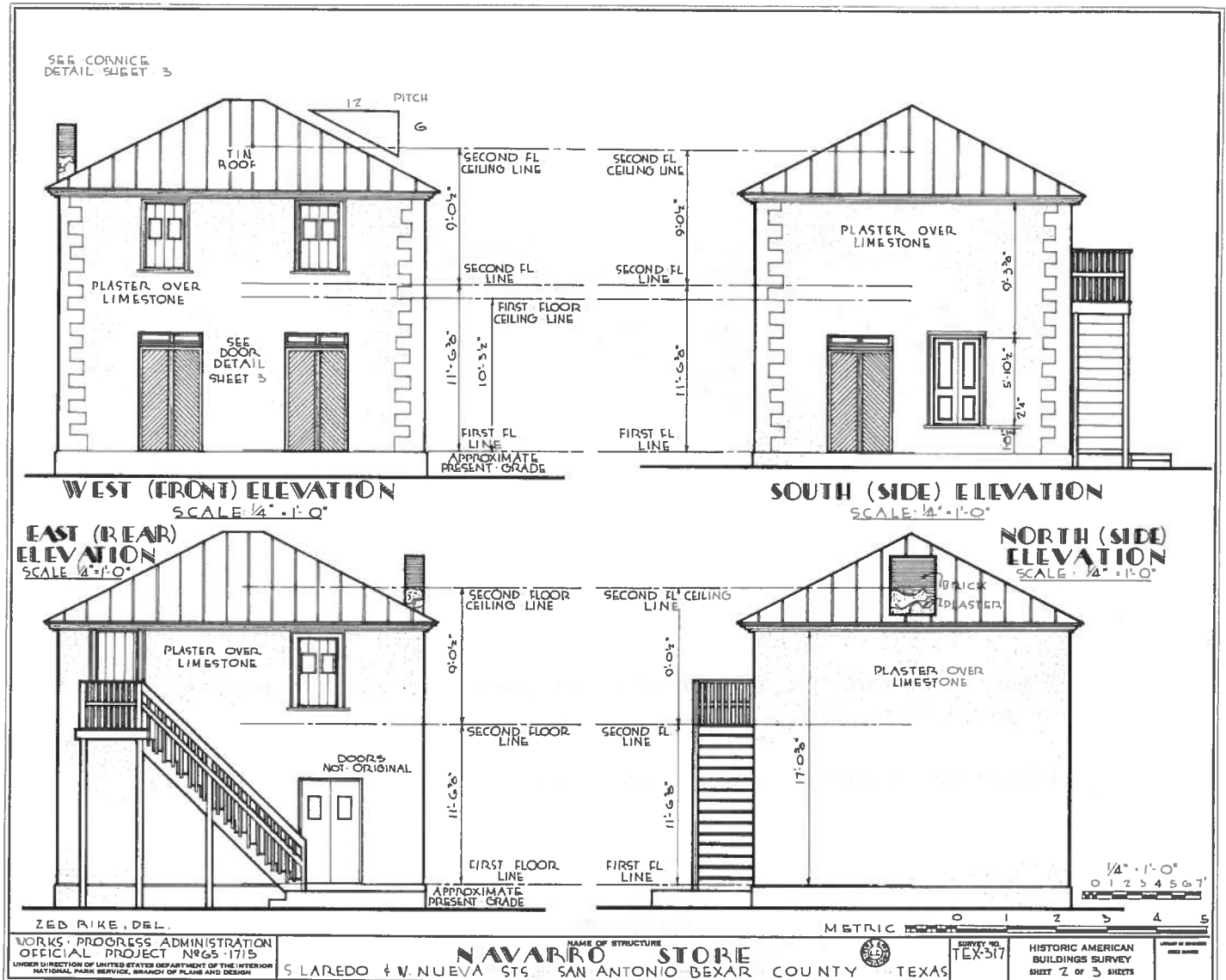
Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, reproduction # HABS TEX, 15-SANT, 14- (sheet 1 of 3).

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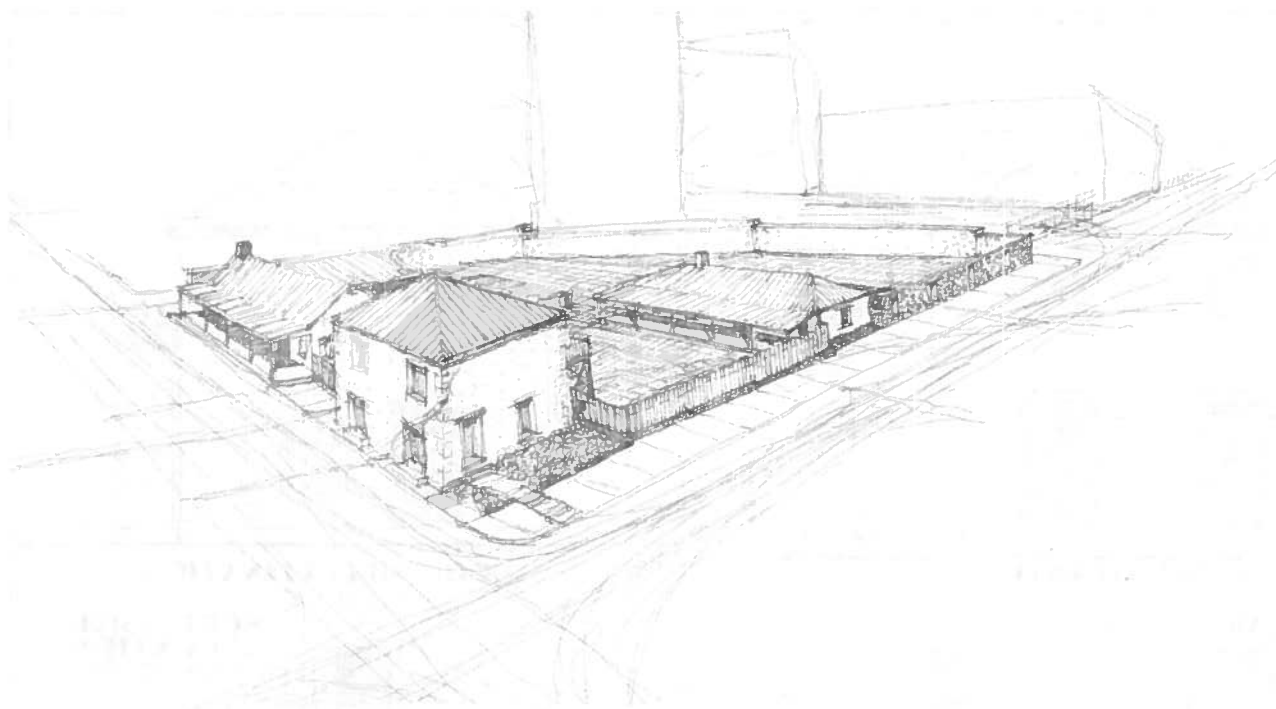
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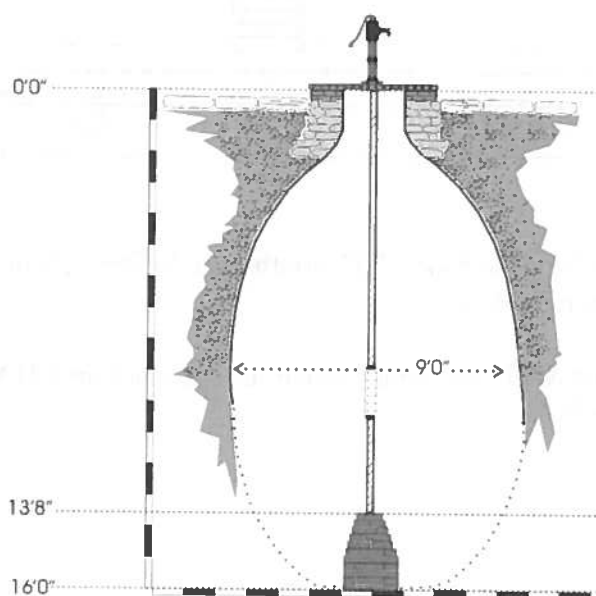
**Figure 5.** "Jose Antonio Navarro Store, 232 South Laredo Street, San Antonio, Bexar County, TX." Drawn in 1936.

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**Figure 6.** A perspective view of the Casa Navarro site, looking northeast, drawn by Brooks Martin, AIA, ca. 1960.

Files of the Texas Historical Commission, Austin.



**Figure 7.** Section drawing of the cistern, a contributing structure.

Files of the Texas Historical Commission, Austin.

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**Figure 8.** The Navarro Store, ca. 1930-1933. Photographer not known. Image courtesy of the Texas Historical Commission, Austin.

Note that by this time, both the store and the adjacent house featured standing seam metal over their historic, wood shingle roofs. The frame lean-to structure on the Nueva Street-facing side of the building was removed ca. 1960.

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**Figure 9.** “Historic American Buildings Survey, Arthur W. Stewart, Photographer, April 6, 1936. NORTHWEST ELEVATION (WEST FRONT AND NORTH SIDE). Jose Antonio Navarro Store, 232 South Laredo Street, San Antonio, Bexar County, TX.”

Because the building served as a grocery and café or bar at this time, its walls have been colorfully painted with advertising.

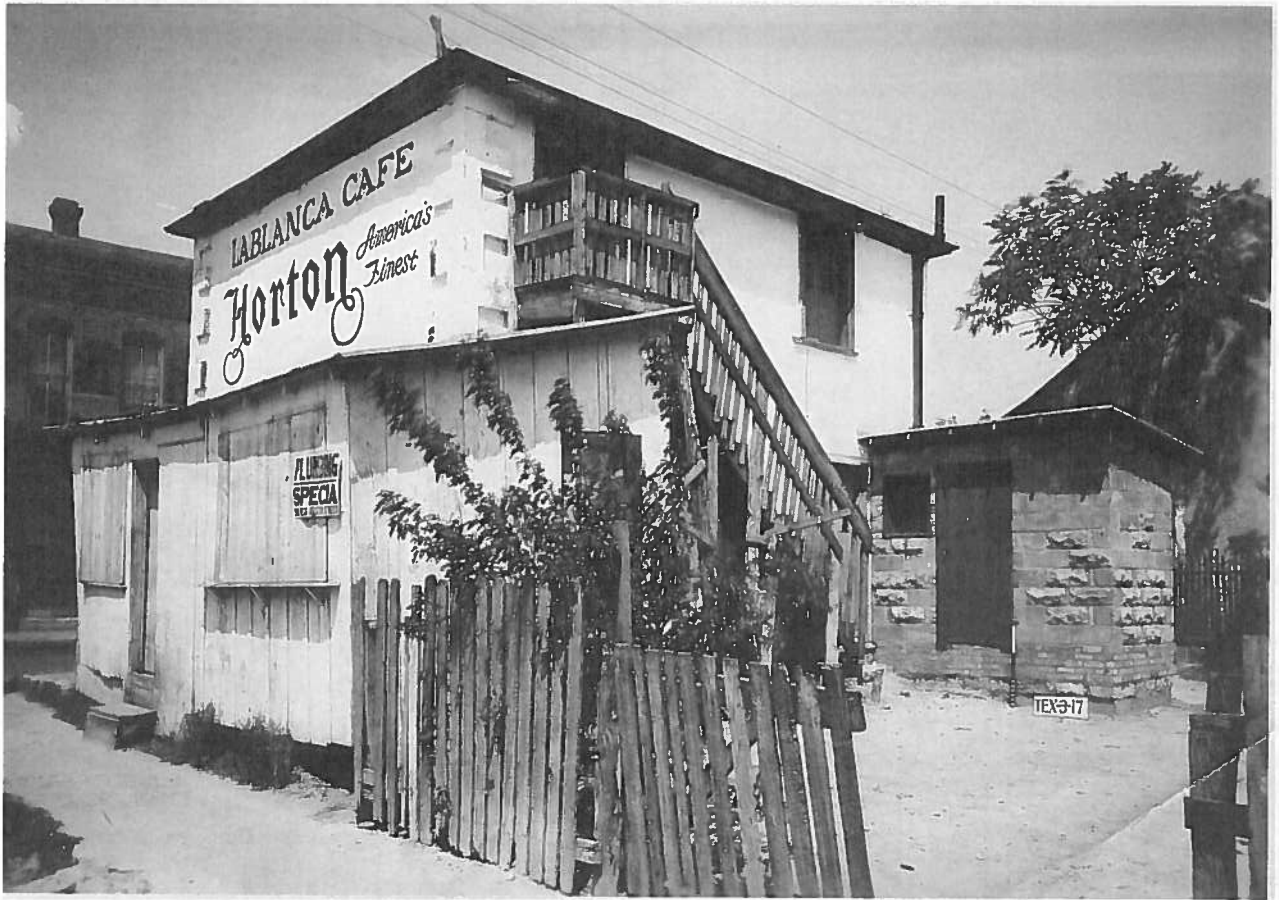
Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, reproduction # HABS TEX, 15-SANT, 14--1.

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**Figure 10.** "Historic American Buildings Survey, Arthur W. Stewart, Photographer, April 6, 1936. SOUTHEAST ELEVATION (SOUTH SIDE AND EAST REAR). Jose Antonio Navarro Store, 232 South Laredo Street, San Antonio, Bexar County, TX."

Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, reproduction # HABS TEX, 15-SANT, 14--2.

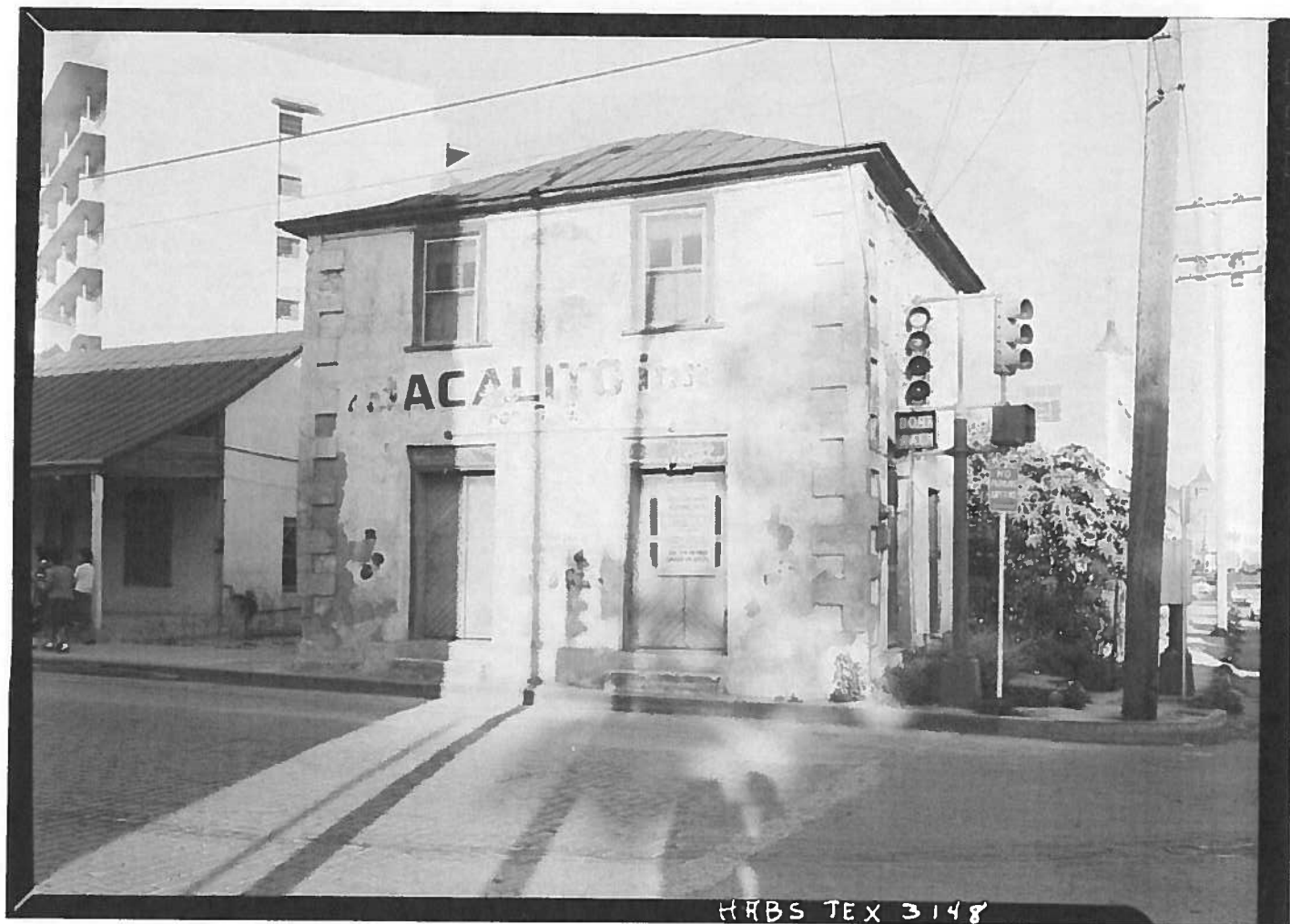


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**Figure 11.** "Historic American Buildings Survey, Jack Boucher, Photographer, October 1961. WEST ELEVATION OF STORE (HOUSE ON LEFT). Jose Antonio Navarro Store, 232 South Laredo Street, San Antonio, Bexar County, TX."

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**Figure 12.** "Historic American Buildings Survey, Jack Boucher, Photographer, October 1961. FRONT (WEST) ELEVATION OF HOUSE. Jose Antonio Navarro House, 228 South Laredo Street, San Antonio, Bexar County, TX."

Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, reproduction # HABS TEX, 15-SANT, 23--1.

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**Figure 13.** Oblique view of the Navarro House and Store, looking southeast from across Laredo Street, ca. 1960.

Image courtesy of the Texas Historical Commission.

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**Figure 14.** Courtyard view of the Navarro House, with contributing well (foreground) and cistern, camera facing northwest, ca. 1962.

Image courtesy of the Texas Historical Commission.

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**Figure 15.** Interior of the Navarro Store and Office, looking up through charred second-floor joists, ca. 1962.

Brooks Martin wrote in his 1967 "Notes" that sometime after 1936, a fire destroyed the floor joists and the canvas ceiling.

Image courtesy of the Texas Historical Commission.



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**Figure 16.** Interior of Navarro House, ca. 1962. This is the northeastern room of the house, thought to be the bedroom of José Antonio Navarro.

Image courtesy of the Texas Historical Commission.



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**Figure 17.** José Antonio Navarro, ca. 1860. Photograph courtesy of the Texas Historical Commission.